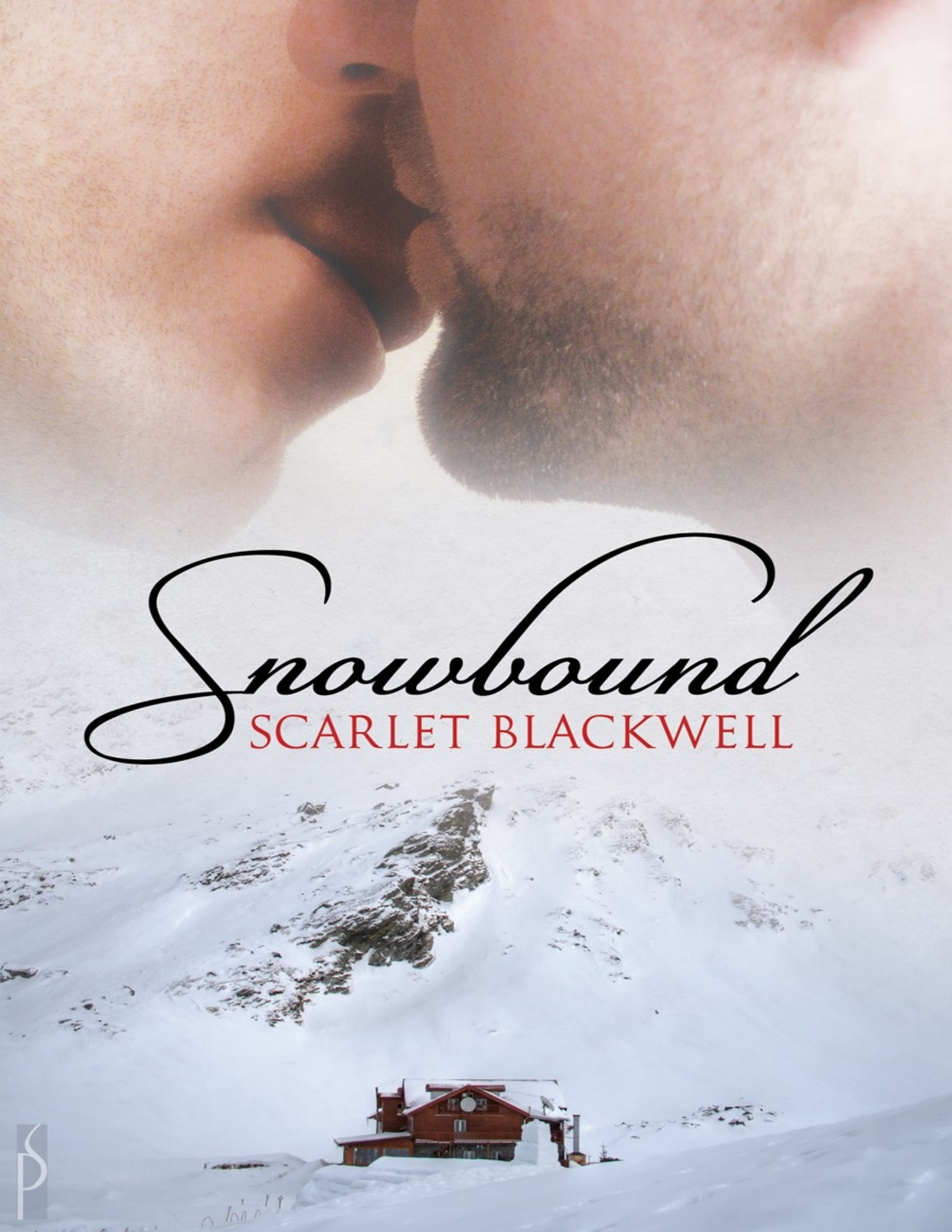

Snowbound
SCARLET BLACKWELL

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Snowbound

Scarlet Blackwell

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PART ONE

CHAPTER ONE

The car was toasty warm. Winter tyres on the front, chains on the back, bumping steadily against flattened snow. The rhythmic clacking of the windscreen wipers started to have a numbing effect. Hayden Berry felt himself start to drift. He forced his eyes open, looking at the orange glow of the streetlights illuminating five-foot-high drifts of snow piled along the sides of the road.

He hadn't seen a sign in forever and was pretty sure he was lost in some hick town somewhere in South Dakota. This had been a bad idea. Why exactly was he driving across state in the middle of February? All he wanted was to find the border and head back home, but the snow flurries coming down were starting to make driving conditions hazardous. It was ten pm. His was the only car on the road. He was the only one not tucked up in bed. Perhaps he should find a motel and pull over before he ended up in a ditch.

A loud bang made him yell and curse in fright. He fought the wheel as he lost control of the car, careering into the centre of the road, trying his hardest to turn it into the skid. He braked and felt a crunch under his jabbing foot as the brakes locked, doing nothing to slow his momentum, but he got the car back over to the right side of the road. His vehicle kept going. It mounted the sidewalk and ploughed into a streetlight. Hayden was thrown forward, cracking his forehead on the wheel, then back, restrained by his seatbelt. He sat there stunned and groaning a moment in the snow-blanketed silence.

Gradually he recovered his senses. His head wasn't bleeding. It just had a lump but there was blood in his mouth; he must have bitten his tongue. The engine was still running. It gave him hope the car might still be drivable, at least to a motel, but what was the loud noise that had made him lose control in the first place?

He unfastened his seatbelt, zipped up his parka and pulled the hood up before he slid cautiously out of the car onto unsteady legs. The cold hit him in

the face like he'd stepped into a freezer. The wind dashed stinging ice crystals against his skin. By the time he'd assessed the damage to the front—a dented hood, could have been worse—and walked around the back of the car, his face was numb.

He stood looking down in dismay. The left rear tyre was completely shredded. Oh fuck, now what? He glanced around. He was in the middle of nowhere. No houses, no stores, no lights of any kind save those shining over the lonely road. It might be miles to the nearest house. He would die of hypothermia before he got there.

He slid back into the car, shivering violently, his teeth chattering. The engine still circulated the heat and he held his frozen hands up to the blowers, grunting at the pain of defrosting. He tried not to let panic overwhelm him. He would call 911, it was simple. He reached into the back for the bag stored behind the passenger seat, scrabbling blindly in the front pocket before he located his cell. He flipped it open and stared down in disbelief as the screen remained dark. The battery had gone.

Great. Just fucking great. He swore, hurling the cell behind him. What an idiot he was. Crossing this sort of terrain with no contingency plans, without even charging his phone first. What sort of a prick was he?

He glanced at the temperature gauge next to the CD player. Minus thirteen. Just peachy.

He sat staring through the window into the darkness. He was going to have to walk. He couldn't sit here all night with the engine running and he couldn't stop it or he'd freeze to death. He had an extra sweater in his bag he could put on under his parka and hat, scarf and gloves on the back seat. He made no move to get ready. At that moment he would rather have stuck pins in his eyes than have gone out into that cruel weather once more.

Suddenly he saw a light in the distance. He strained his eyes, trying to work out if it was headlights and if they were getting closer. Yes and yes! He flung the door open, almost falling into the snow in his haste to get out. He

pulled his right leg behind him. It had gone to sleep on him, and never worked well at the best of times.

Hayden stumbled into the centre of the road, waving his arms violently. The freezing air burning into his lungs caused him to cough.

The twin points of light came closer and then he saw the red and blue bars on top of the vehicle, not currently illuminated. Oh God, it was a cop. Hayden could have fallen to his knees in worship.

The cruiser slowed down. It drove past and as Hayden turned around, dumbstruck, thinking the guy had not seen him in the blizzard, it made a U-turn and pulled up behind his stricken car.

Oh God, oh thank you God.

He waited while the cop got out of the car, pulling a beanie hat low over his ears. He strode toward Hayden, tall, lean, confident on the snow, wearing a thick police parka and winter boots. In the glow of the streetlights, his eyes were pale, colourless, his jaw smooth and chiselled. Hayden would have said he was about twenty-five, the same age as him. Something about the cop made Hayden metaphorically sit up and take notice in a big way.

"Having some trouble here, sir?"

In the history of dumb questions, it was perhaps the dumbest Hayden had ever heard but he bit back the sarcastic reply he wanted to spew forth. This man was his saviour. He would do well to remember that. Let the cop say what he wanted. If he got Hayden somewhere safe and warm tonight, it didn't matter.

"Yeah, I…" He checked himself. His words were slurred because the cold had completely numbed his jaw. He didn't want the cop to think he'd been driving under the influence.

The cop glanced at the blown-out back wheel before he walked around the front of the car. "Not too bad," he said. "Okay, pop the trunk and I'll change the tyre for you."

Obviously he thought Hayden was some idiot who didn't know how to change a tyre and was just being polite about it. It wasn't quite so simple.

"I don't have one."

The cop regarded him poker-faced. "Excuse me?"

"I don't have a spare tyre."

"Oh, right. You do realise it's an offence not to carry a spare tyre in these parts?"

Hayden bristled. He didn't even know what county he was in. "Want to arrest me? Be my guest. At least I'll get a warm bed for the night."

The cop's eyes narrowed, his jaw tightening. "I can do without the belligerence on a night like tonight, sir. I've only stopped to help, that's all, and I'm merely pointing out that if you hadn't disregarded the law, you wouldn't be in the predicament you're in now."

Hayden's face heated in humiliation. He hung his head. "Sorry. I'm a little frazzled."

"If you'll step closer, sir."

Hayden lifted his head. "What?"

"Step closer and breathe on me please, sir."

Hayden groaned inwardly. The breathalyser probably followed next and Hayden had drunk so much last night, he wasn't even confident he was under the limit. He moved up to the cop, a few inches shorter than him, blinking as snowflakes fell on his eyelashes. Standing on tip toe, he huffed into the cop's face.

The cop blinked. He didn't move back. "Chocolate," he said.

"Yeah."

For a moment their gazes met, held, and Hayden was deeply unsettled. Something in the pit of his stomach uncoiled, filling his freezing body with heat.

"All right, get in my car and warm yourself up."

Hayden ducked into the back seat of his car and retrieved his bag and cell before he locked the car pointlessly and made his way over to the cop car, limping, his right leg cramping.

He slid into the passenger seat and tossed his bag into the back as the cop

climbed in beside him. Hayden pulled on his hat and gloves.

The cop closed the door and switched the heaters up to high. "Did you hurt yourself?"

"What? Oh no, that's an old injury. I've always got a limp. Plays up more in the cold."

The cop reached up and flicked on the overhead light. The tip of Hayden's nose burned as the heat swarmed over it. His lips stung. He turned his head to look at the cop and saw the man's eyes were golden-green, fringed with lush lashes. His lips were supple and pink.

"You've got a bump." The cop gestured to Hayden's forehead.

"Yeah. It's okay."

"What's your name?"

Hayden swallowed, tried out his numb jaw. "Hayden Berry."

"Okay, Hayden. I'm Deputy Sheriff Dylan Hubble. Where are you going to?"

"Wyoming. Rock Springs."

"Hmm. Well, I'll tell you now, every hotel in town's full for the annual Iceman Festival."

What? Ice man? Hell, Hayden was sure he could have competed in that himself if he'd stood outside much longer.

"So you can have a cell for the night, or my spare room I guess. I'll get a tow truck to come out in the morning."

Taken aback, Hayden stammered a little. "T-that's very kind of you."

"What, the cell?"

"No, your—"

"I'm kidding." Dylan grinned, showing teeth neat and white. He flicked off the light and pulled out around Hayden's car. "Okay then, Chez Hubble it is."

Hayden sat in silence as they drove down the lonely road, turning off after a couple of miles. *I really would have frozen to death out there.*

Dylan drove slowly down a long, winding road into the heart of a small town. Hayden watched shops and cafés go by, a couple of bars, a gas station.

Then Dylan turned onto a dirt track and the car bumped over ruts and gouges. It had been recently ploughed but the falling snow was making short work of that.

Dylan pulled onto a driveway and shut off the engine. "Here we are." He got out and Hayden followed him, carrying his bag.

The deputy's house was a cottage, rather quaint with a white picket fence and small front yard. He didn't seem like the kind of man who would live in a house like this. Perhaps he lived with his grandma.

He opened the door and flicked on the hall light and then stood to one side taking his boots off. Hayden banged his feet on the step and entered, standing on the mat while he took his own boots off.

"Let me take your coat."

They stood close in the cramped hallway. Hayden pulled his gloves off to unzip his parka and his fingers were clumsy and uncoordinated.

"Come here." Dylan unzipped him and pulled the jacket off his shoulders. Their eyes met before Dylan turned away, hanging his coat up, pulling his hat, gloves and scarf off. His hair was short and a glossy, chestnut brown.

Hayden watched as Dylan slid the thick snowpants down long, strong legs. He couldn't help but assess the bulge revealed in the tight regulation uniform pants below. The deputy sheriff was all man, and a fine figure of one at that. That same uncoiling of heat blazed through Hayden's belly. His thoughts disturbed him.

Dylan took the coat, hat, and gloves from his hand and led the way through to the living room where he crouched to light the electric fire. "Sit here and get warm. I'm just going to get changed."

Hayden silently wished the cop would stay in uniform. He knelt down, huddling close to the growing heat. Footsteps sounded on the stairs, followed by walking overhead of him, then the banging of a closet door. He glanced around. No photos, no sign of another half or a grandma.

Dylan reappeared in jeans, which continued to advertise his bulge just right, and a sweater. Even without the bulky parka, his shoulders and chest were

broad and muscular. "Want some tea?" he asked.

"Sure."

"How?"

"Milk, no sugar."

"Coming up." Dylan disappeared into the kitchen and clattered about. "So, Rock Springs. You're a long way from home, boy."

Something about the use of the word boy rankled Hayden. He was sure he was the same age as the deputy, even if his fresh-faced looks put him as younger. "Yeah," he muttered. "I don't even know where I am."

"You're in Blackstone, at the ass-end of South Dakota, population five hundred and fifteen."

"Jesus."

"Yeah, that's most people's reaction."

Hayden stood up to save from calling through the door. He went into the kitchen, hovering by the table as he watched Dylan making tea.

"So what are you doing here?" The cop asked.

"I went to a wedding reception in Minneapolis. Got on I-90 to come back through South Dakota to Wyoming. There was an accident at Spearfish so I got off the highway to cross the border."

"And went in the opposite direction toward Montana. You'd have been better taking I-35 into Iowa and coming back across Nebraska on I-80."

Smart ass. Hayden said nothing.

Dylan brought two mugs to the table and motioned to Hayden to sit. "I can't promise we won't be snowed in by morning. You might be looking at an enforced stay in our little town." Dylan picked up his mug and took a sip. Hayden glanced at his left hand. No wedding ring.

"I hope not. I have to be back at work on Monday."

"What do you do?"

"I'm a dentist."

Dylan laughed a little. "I figured you had to be. You have great teeth."

Hayden blushed unaccountably. The cop's were fabulous too. He'd just love to open his mouth and have a good look inside at his molars. He wondered how many fillings Dylan had and if he'd ever worn braces. This line of thought was slightly weird and he knew it. The cop's eyes were golden in the glow of the kitchen lights. His face was pale and very closely shaved. He was perhaps the most stunning man Hayden had ever seen in his life and Hayden didn't tend to look at men. At least not that he would ever admit. But if Dylan walked down the street in Rock Springs, Hayden guessed he might have fallen over himself to get a closer look. He would have at least offered him a free dental check-up.

"So, I can give you a check-up in exchange for the bed," he joked, except not really.

Dylan grinned. "I'm good, thanks. I just had one last month. See? No fillings." He opened his mouth wide. Hayden nearly shuddered in delight at the two perfect sets of back teeth presented for inspection. Truly Dylan was as beautiful inside as he was outside. Every tooth was present and correct, neatly lined up in place, plaque and tartar free, no fillings, wisdoms erupted and fully formed. Marvellous. This man clearly didn't put junk in his mouth or he was very lucky.

"Anyway, what were you doing eating chocolate in your car? Are dentists supposed to eat chocolate?"

Hayden smiled wryly. "No. They're not supposed to consume the vast quantities of wine I consumed over the weekend either."

Dylan smirked. "Everyone's allowed a treat." He got up. "Let me get dinner started. Is mushroom risotto okay for you?"

"Sure, but don't go to any trouble."

"It's no trouble. You're still shivering. Go upstairs and take a shower. Or a bath if you want; there's plenty of hot water. Towels in the cupboard, I'll leave you some pyjamas outside."

Hayden stood. Dylan was generous in the extreme. "Thanks."

"No problem."

The bathroom was cosy and warm. It didn't have a lock on the door but Hayden wasn't too concerned. He chose the bath. While it was running, he stripped off and hung his damp pants over the towel rack to dry. He added some scented oil to the water and swirled it around.

A small tap came at the door. "PJs outside."

"Thanks." He listened to the footsteps retreat down the stairs before he relaxed. This was all kind of surreal. He was supposed to be at home in the next few hours, tucked up and instead he was taking a bath at the Deputy Sheriff of Blackstone's house and thinking illicit thoughts about him.

He climbed into scorching water, sighing in bliss as he sank beneath it. Hayden had thought about men this way before, since his late teens, but had always sublimated the urge to do anything about it. He had never had a man and never would, as far as he was concerned, and over the last few years, he thought he had successfully beaten away the thoughts. At least until tonight when Dylan had demanded his attention. *Damn him*.

Was the deputy gay? Hayden hadn't noticed anything amiss in those golden eyes, anything which might indicate interest. Which was for the best. Now was not the time for Hayden's libido to sit up and take notice.

He glanced around the bathroom. Electric toothbrush standing in the holder together with toothpaste. A manual one by its side. Was that Dylan's spare for when his batteries went dead or did it belong to a significant other? The products crammed onto the side were all male and there were plenty of them. That pointed to Dylan being gay in itself even if Hayden was somewhat stereotyping him. Straight men used moisturiser too, didn't they? He certainly did.

Hayden sighed. He took some soap off the edge of the bath and lathered it up, washing himself over his shoulders and under his arms. He lifted his right leg, soaping it, looking at the scar which wound around his calf from knee to ankle, pale pink, squashing and misshaping his leg, the scar which had been part of him for the last seven years.

He rested his leg back down. Under the water it didn't ache as much. Still, though, he could have done with some painkillers out of his bag and the amitriptyline, which he took only at night, the one that knocked him out into the heaviest of sleeps.

He closed his eyes, letting the silence in the house overtake him, and the vague clatter in the kitchen below wash over him.

CHAPTER TWO

Hayden jerked awake to a tap on the door. He'd fallen asleep. "Hope you haven't drowned in there. Dinner in five."

"Thanks." Hayden stood up. He grabbed the nearby towel off the sink and rubbed his upper half before he climbed out. His leg gave a twinge of pain when he was too brisk with his drying. He borrowed a sly roll of deodorant from the stick on the window sill and then wrapped the towel around his waist to open the door. Pyjama bottoms, T-shirt, thick socks and a robe were draped over the banister outside. Hayden plucked them free and retreated back inside to dress.

He let the water out of the tub, rubbed the damp hair at his nape and flicked the light off.

Something smelled good downstairs. A steaming dish of risotto sat in the centre of the table along with a salad and an open bottle of wine, two glasses already poured. Hayden nearly salivated. He didn't know what he looked forward to more, the food or the alcohol. First things first, though. He went to his bag, which sat next to the couch, and retrieved the bottle of pills from the top. He shook two into his hand. Then he entered the kitchen.

Dylan glanced up at him from where he stood grating parmesan cheese. "Just in time."

"Mind if I get a glass of water?" Hayden showed what he held in his hand.

"Sure." Dylan reached a glass from the overhead cupboard and handed it over.

"Thanks."

"Leg still troubling you?"

Hayden ran half a glass from the tap. "Yeah. Not as bad after the hot bath, mind you." He swallowed the tablets down and took his glass to the table.

"That's good. What happened, anyway?" Dylan brought the cheese over to the table and took his place. He gestured to Hayden to serve himself.

Hayden took the spoon from the risotto and piled food on his plate. "Car

crash when I was eighteen. I nearly lost my leg."

Dylan shook his head. "That's terrible. You must live with constant pain."

"I do. I recently had nerve decompression surgery. I'm supposed to wear a brace to help with the foot drop, but it's not my bag." He grinned. "Way too unsexy."

Dylan smiled gently. His golden eyes were soft with empathy. Hayden knew it was laughable that the deputy would ever be interested in him and his deformed leg. He took some salad, gulped some wine, and then started eating.

"So whose wedding was it?"

"A guy I went to college with. He married another guy in Canada last week where they live. Came back home for the reception."

Dylan smiled, a crooked little smile that made him look schoolboyish and his eyes glitter with green sparks. Hayden's stomach clenched in that familiar way again. He told himself the heat spreading through his limbs was the wine.

"That's great."

"Yeah." At least Hayden had established one thing—that the deputy sheriff wasn't homophobic. In a small town like this, he had expected it to be the opposite. He relaxed a little. Dylan wouldn't perhaps see his long history of illicit desires as something to cast him into the pit over, although having them directed at *him* might change Dylan's mind. He needed to get himself under control. The guy was beautiful, but he was off limits. Why do something about it now when he never had in the past? He had obligations to rein in his desires.

He tried to spark up some more conversation. "Do you always invite strangers to stay the night?" Wrong thing to say. He felt himself blushing.

"Only ones I like the look of."

Hayden paused mid-chew. His cheeks flamed further. He stared into Dylan's eyes, trying to gauge the meaning of his words. Dylan seemed unconcerned at his provocative words. He poured Hayden some more wine.

Hayden was wrong-footed, unsure. His palms became clammy and his heart beat faster. "H-how did you know I wasn't a serial killer?" He cursed the sudden stutter.

"I'm a good judge of character."

"You didn't even ask to see my ID."

Dylan regarded him. "Are you trying to convince me you're a sinister, untrustworthy guest, Hayden?"

"No."

"Then relax." Dylan carried on eating.

A loud clatter from the far end of the kitchen startled Hayden. A large black-and-white cat entered via a cat flap, paused to shake snow from its fur, then sauntered across the room, aiming for Dylan's legs, winding himself around them before stopping to eye Hayden carefully.

"This is Boots," Dylan said. "I don't get much company so he's probably shocked to see you."

This little tidbit about company made Hayden happy. Perhaps no significant other called around or stayed over. He put his hand down. "Hey, Boots."

The cat, looking indeed like he wore four long white boots over the black fur on each leg, came hesitantly forward, sniffed Hayden's hand, then arched his back, holding his tail in the air. Hayden stroked his silky spine. "How old is he?"

"Three. Found him abandoned one winter as a kitten."

"He's gorgeous."

"Yeah."

Hayden stroked him some more before Boots wandered off to two dishes set near the heat vent and started to eat hungrily. Hayden resumed his meal.

"This is really good."

"Thanks."

"How long have you been a cop?"

"Four years."

"Are you from these parts?"

"Yeah, I was born here."

"Ever thought of leaving?"

Dylan raised one eyebrow. "Should I?"

"No, I just… wondered if you'd thought of working in a big city."

"Not really. I like it just fine here."

Hayden didn't really understand why he enjoyed living and working in the middle of nowhere but each to his own. Rock Springs was hardly the centre of the universe either. Perhaps the cop stayed here for someone else. The place might have looked like a bachelor pad but maybe he had a woman tucked away somewhere. Or a man.

He finished off his food. Dylan was already done with his. He poured them some more wine, then stood to take the dishes. Hayden automatically got up to help him. "Stay. Rest your leg."

Hayden did as he was told.

"Can you manage some dessert?"

"What've you got?"

"Homemade apple pie."

"Sure. Did you make it yourself?"

Dylan grinned endearingly. "No. One of the ladies in town made it for me." He reached a film-wrapped dish from the fridge and uncovered it. It already had one generous piece cut from it and he set about carving two more now, transferring them to bowls.

"A girlfriend?" Hayden asked trying to sound casual when the answer was all important.

Dylan laughed. "She's seventy-two with a blue rinse, a nice set of dentures, and pearls, what do you think?"

Hayden shrugged. "You might like the mature woman."

"Well, I don't. They make me things because they think being a single man that I don't look after myself properly."

Delight blossomed through Hayden's chest. "You look like you look after yourself very well," he said. Dylan turned to glance at him and caught Hayden's appraising eyes moving over his body, lingering on his ass. For a moment there

was an embarrassed silence, their gazes locked.

Okay, he knows I'm hot for him.

The wine had let some of Hayden's inhibitions down. He didn't feel quite as mortified by this as he should have done. He only wanted to know if Dylan liked girls or boys.

"Do you want it hot, with cream?"

Hayden almost choked on his wine. He saw Dylan's eyes dance with amusement. "The pie."

"Oh, y-yeah."

Christ. He wanted it hot with cream all right. Hayden locked his hands together on his lap, fidgeting, his cock half-hard. Dylan put a dish and spoon down before him and Hayden took a bite.

It was good, the apples spiced with cinnamon, the pastry melting and buttery. The cream was decadent on his tongue, rich and sensual. Hayden's head started to swim. The man opposite him was all sorts of wonderful rolled into one. Hayden wanted him the way he hadn't wanted a man in years.

Dylan stood and took their dishes when Hayden had done. "Coffee?"

"Please."

Dylan set the machine to brew. He rinsed dishes and stacked them in the dishwasher while he waited.

"Can I help you?"

"No. Go sit in the living room. I'll bring it in."

Hayden went into the living room. He took the seat nearest to the fire at one end of the couch and relaxed back. He was sleepy. The painkillers had kicked in, magnified by the wine and his leg felt just fine. Despite the fact he was miles from home, his car wrecked against a streetlight, sharing the home of the sexiest man he had ever met, Hayden felt peaceful.

Dylan joined him shortly. He sat at the opposite end of the couch from Hayden, an empty cushion between them, and placed a mug before him on the coffee table. "Thanks."

Dylan sipped from his own. "It's decaf. It won't keep you up."

Hayden *was* being kept up, no problem, but that was Dylan's fault. He shifted on the couch, adjusting his robe so it was looser at the front.

Was he obvious? Dylan didn't look. He got up, fished a remote from down the side of the other couch and flicked on the flat-screen TV. "Sometimes cable goes down in the snow." A noisy rock song filled the room before the image of a guy with black hair and black-rimmed eyes formed on the screen, yelling at the camera about how he wouldn't let life kick him down. "We're in luck." Dylan turned the sound down a bit but left the rock channel on.

"What music do you like?"

"This."

Dylan smiled. "A man after my own heart." He lifted his cup to his lips. His gaze held Hayden's steadily. In the silence between them, Hayden's heart seemed to beat in his ears, each squeeze of blood echoing within.

Dylan put his cup down. He shifted abruptly, taking the middle seat next to Hayden. Hayden's skin prickled. His cock stood rigidly to attention.

"So what else do you like to do when you're not pulling people's teeth out?" Dylan's tone was low and intimate. His voice swept across Hayden's needy skin like a caress. It was clear now that he could have Dylan if he wanted him, but Hayden was afraid, mortally terrified of giving into temptation after so long, of taking what he had always wanted.

He stammered. "I-I like t-to read."

"That's good." Dylan's hand lay on the couch inches away from Hayden's. "What's your favourite book?"

"I… *Birdsong* by Sebastian Faulks."

"I've read that. That's a good choice."

"What's yours?"

"I like *The Count of Monte Cristo*. I read it when I was little and it's lost none of its magic."

"Great book. Did you ever see Gérard Depardieu play him?"

"Yeah. I've got the DVD. Love that version."

To Hayden, this book discussion seemed like an elaborate form of foreplay. Talking about books aroused him further. His skin burned for touch. His cock leaked against the soft material of his pyjama pants.

"What else do you like?"

"I…" Hayden floundered. All sense had deserted his brain. His breathing came faster, his heart racing.

Dylan reached out a hand suddenly, swept his fingers down Hayden's cheek, causing him to flinch. "Do you want me to stop talking?"

Hayden nodded mutely while he stared into the golden eyes as Dylan leaned toward him.

The cop's lips were almost over his when Hayden said, "I'm married."

Dylan drew back a couple of inches, his face still intimately close, his hand still on Hayden's face. He spoke in a whisper. "I know." His other hand stroked over Hayden's wedding band. "If I said I didn't care right at this moment, does that make me a terrible person?"

Hayden couldn't speak. He closed his eyes as Dylan leaned closer again and pressed his mouth to his.

It was the first time he'd kissed a man. Dylan's lips were all melting softness, gentle sweetness, belying the strength of his muscular body. His fingertips slid to the back of Hayden's neck, stroking the short hair at his nape, fingering it lightly.

A moan spilled from Hayden's lips. He put a hand on Dylan's shoulder before moving it to his head, pulling him closer, deepening the kiss. Dylan took the hint. His tongue, feathering lightly over the inside of his mouth, was met by Hayden's own. The kiss turned from hesitation into explicit need. Dylan's thigh pressed against his. An arm slid around his back.

The kiss seemed to take all the oxygen from his lungs but Hayden didn't break it. He felt a hand on the front of his robe, pulling the belt open, revealing his hardness in the flimsy pants with ease, before fingertips eased under his T-shirt, up his back, smoothing over his spine.

Hayden shuddered at the touch. He kissed Dylan harder as the deputy's hand slid right to his neck and down again, to his waist, fingers inching beneath the elastic of his pants to play over the top of one buttock.

Hayden caught his breath. He couldn't get close enough to Dylan like this, seated side by side. He needed to touch and kiss him. Dylan gripped both buttocks suddenly, pulling him. "Sit on my lap."

The command had Hayden climbing in an instant. He straddled Dylan, leaning down to kiss him again. Dylan pushed the robe off his shoulders and let it drop to the ground. His hands ran greedily up Hayden's back, leaving flames in their wake. He pulled Hayden closer, rocking deliberately against him so Hayden felt the hard bulge in his jeans, pressing against his own.

He whimpered, lifting both arms obediently as Dylan yanked off his T-shirt. The cop buried his face instantly in Hayden's neck, dropping heated kisses, working down his torso, holding him by the hips as he teased at one nipple.

Hayden hissed in pleasure. A wet tongue laved his nipple, flicked against it before Dylan sucked it, bit lightly, blew on it, leaving it stiff and slick. Hayden bucked against him, rubbing his crotch against Dylan's chest, pushing down so the hard length pressed against his ass.

Oh God, he wasn't sure he had ever been this hot in his life. Dylan pulled back. He discarded his sweater and Hayden saw a chiselled torso complete with six pack. A black tattoo of a dragon completely covered his right bicep. He stared, hands trailing down Dylan's body, stroking, seeking.

Dylan breathed heavily. His fingertips nudged the waistband of Hayden's pants, where his hard cock threatened to rear over the top. His thumb stroked the head, leaving the thin material damp. Hayden couldn't have given away his desire any further. Dylan's hand moved down, fingers following the outline of Hayden's hard shaft until Hayden wanted to beg to be touched.

Dylan was taking his time, though. His lips sought Hayden's neck, kissing gently as he stroked through his pants. He found Hayden's balls and squeezed lightly, massaging them.

Hayden ground down on Dylan's erection. The solid feel of it against his ass excited him beyond belief, even with two layers of clothes separating them. He had never got this close to another man's cock before. He had never imagined one breaching his ass before as he did now.

Dylan's thumbs hooked under his waistband and pulled. Hayden's hard cock head sprang free, oozing at the tip. Dylan gave what sounded like a little growl. "Take these off." He started to push Hayden's pants down and Hayden helped him as far as his knees, when he stopped.

Dylan's gaze fixed on his. His hand moved down inside the pants, stroking Hayden's right leg. "Let me see," he whispered.

Hayden swallowed. For someone who never wore shorts, who only ever showed his leg to his wife, this was a big deal. Nonetheless, he climbed from Dylan's lap and dropped his pants, revealing his scar.

Dylan's glance flickered down a brief moment before he pulled Hayden back onto his lap. As he kissed him, his hand moved down Hayden's calf, stroking tenderly, tracing the scar with delicate fingertips.

Heat consumed Hayden. Dylan's touch and kiss was so measured and soothing, so full of passion and desire. It made Hayden feel what he had never felt before in his life—desirable. He was going to give in, he knew that. He was going to let Dylan do whatever he wanted and he was going to glory in it.

He popped the button open on Dylan's jeans and felt the hard bulge instantly pushing at the underwear beneath. His hand trembled as he drew down the zip. Dylan gasped as Hayden's fingers slid under his boxers to wrap around his hard shaft.

Oh God, just the feel of the smooth, heated flesh in his hand made Hayden's cock throb with the need for release, his balls aching. Dylan surged forward, kissing him hard, plundering his mouth with his tongue, gripping his buttocks hard to crush Hayden's straining cock against his belly.

Hayden rocked his hips, grinding himself, working Dylan's cock in his boxers, feeling it leak onto his hand. The sounds of their breathing mingled;

gasps and groans punctuated their kisses.

Dylan pulled back. He stood, lifting Hayden in his arms in one swift movement and Hayden wrapped arms and legs around him, clinging as Dylan climbed the stairs, carrying him to bed.

Hayden had been a straight man all his life. He had never been able to indulge in the thrill of his lover carrying him to bed. And a thrill was exactly what it was.

Dylan carried him into a bedroom and laid him down on the bed. He flicked on the bedside light and opened the drawer by the bed, taking out a condom and a tube of something.

Hayden stared as Dylan pushed down his jeans and then his boxers, his hard cock springing free. He was a good length, thick and cut, his balls heavy, free of fuzz, his bush trimmed neatly. Hayden sometimes slyly looked at naked men and gay pornography on his computer, when the thoughts in his head became too much. Never had he seen a more perfect specimen than Dylan.

Dylan climbed on top of him. Hayden opened his legs around him and then they were naked cock to naked cock, rubbing, grinding, kissing, working themselves and each other into a frenzy.

Dylan's hand cupped his balls. His fingers slid beneath them, stroking his buttocks, seeking between them, sliding into his cleft. Hayden jerked and flinched as a finger touched his most private area.

Dylan didn't say anything. He opened the tube and squeezed clear liquid onto his hand. Then he put a wet finger back and stroked, pressing, teasing, wetting until Hayden opened up and took him.

Hayden hissed as the finger speared him. He gripped Dylan's wrist. "I haven't ever…"

Dylan regarded him a moment. "Not ever?"

"No."

"Do you want me to?"

"Yes."

"Are you sure?"

"I'm sure."

Dylan kissed him. Hayden guessed it was a gay man's wet dream come true to find a straight, unbroken boy like him in his bed. Dylan would take away his virginity, ride an ass that would never be that tight again, but would feel like a perfect glove clenching his dick.

Hayden didn't much care if Dylan was fulfilling some private fantasy. He only knew he wanted the finger inside him to be replaced by something a lot bigger.

Dylan took his finger free. He lubed up his hand again and rubbed a generous amount around Hayden's entrance, caressing deliberately in a way which inflamed Hayden. Oh, God, it felt good. He imagined the wet slide on him as a tongue, rimming, slicking him up, opening him to receive Dylan.

Dylan sat back on his heels and rolled a rubber on. He leaned forward, guiding his cock between Hayden's wide-spread legs. "If I hurt you, you tell me to stop," he said.

Hayden nodded. He reached down and gave his own erection a stroke as Dylan rubbed hard flesh back and forth over his wet entrance.

Hayden lifted his legs. He wrapped them around Dylan's back. Dylan kissed him as he pressed into him.

Their flesh stuck damply together. The head of his cock stretched Hayden open and he gasped, groaning, head thrown back. Dylan stayed still. He kissed Hayden on the throat and then rocked forward, sheathing himself inch by inch, waiting for Hayden to relax at every step.

Hayden's eyes were fiercely closed. He felt like he would split apart and yet at the same time… the stretch made his cock throb ever harder. The hard flesh in his ass was something Hayden had always wanted and had always denied himself. The way Dylan filled him made Hayden feel complete. He couldn't move or breathe. He hissed as Dylan drew back, impaled him again, stoking his insides into flame.

Hayden gripped at Dylan's back, his lover's flesh dewed with perspiration. He lifted his hips to meet Dylan's next thrust and Dylan groaned, kissed him, tongue tangling with his.

Hayden moved a hand between their bodies to capture his cock. He jerked off as Dylan took him all the way, pressing into him so deeply that Hayden cried out. But he held Dylan still as he tried to draw back, rocked against him as he pleasured himself with his own hand.

Dylan watched him. His eyes glowed golden in the lamplight. Hayden writhed and bucked, pushing down on Dylan's cock as he stroked himself.

Dylan's lips found his throat. He bit lightly, tongued the spot, then put a hand down over Hayden's, so they both worked his cock.

Hayden turned his mouth to Dylan's, gasped into it, grasped his muscular buttocks and pulled him forward, greedily taking him, noisy with every thrust.

The two men became a blur of movement, sweaty bodies sliding together, Hayden's cock straining, his ass clenching Dylan's cock as he felt himself start to blow.

"Oh God, oh God…"

The orgasm was so exquisite it was almost painful. Hayden bucked up, clinging, begging, his cock exploding white ribbons across his own body, spurting endlessly as Dylan pounded him, coming to his own climax with long, hard shudders.

Spent, both of them sank against the mattress, still kissing.

CHAPTER THREE

A phone shrilling in the still blackness awoke Hayden. He blinked, disoriented, as a dark figure shifted beside him, reaching over to the bedside table.

"Hello?" Dylan listened a moment. "Okay, I'm on my way."

Hayden reached out to still the lean figure that slid from the warm bed. "Hey." He knew it wasn't his wife he tried to coax back to bed, but his lover. Guilt had yet to intrude.

Dylan was busy pulling up boxers and pants. "I have to go out on a call. Go back to sleep." He took a sweater off the chair and pulled it on and then he left the room without another word.

Hayden lay listening to shuffles and bangs in the hall as Dylan put on his outdoor gear and boots before the door closed. A moment later an engine started outside and the car pulled away. Hayden fell back into deep sleep.

He didn't know how long Dylan had been gone when the bed dipped beside him and a cold body pressed against his.

"Jesus, you're freezing." Hayden pulled him close.

"It's minus fifteen out now."

"God." Hayden entwined his legs with Dylan's. His warm foot rubbed at a corresponding cold one. "How did it go?"

"Domestic disturbance, nothing to get excited about. Not looking like you're going to get out of here tomorrow, though."

Hayden didn't speak. Right at that moment, he couldn't bring himself to be too upset.

Dylan's hand smoothed down his back. He nosed Hayden's hair. Hayden felt the heat and length of him pressing against his thigh. He cuddled closer and was swiftly gone into sleep again.

Muffled music woke Hayden, followed by clattering in the kitchen below. He rolled onto his back and squinted in the semi-dark room, listening to the rock song he recognised on the radio.

Footsteps on the stairs grew louder. Dylan appeared in the bedroom doorway wearing a robe. "Hey, sleepyhead."

Hayden's stomach tensed. Last night hadn't been the wine-induced mistake he was about to tell himself it was. Dylan was just as hot and just as desirable the morning after. Hayden couldn't deny the night they had spent together had been the most magical of his life. He smiled shyly, not quite so bold without the alcohol.

"Want some eggs and coffee?"

"Sure."

"Okay, be ready in ten. If you want to shower, be my guest." Dylan disappeared. Hayden asked himself if he was disappointed with Dylan's lack of affection. But wouldn't he have baulked anyway at Dylan coming on heavy that morning, instigating lovemaking again? He was sure he would. In the cold light of day, what they had done was shocking and wrong, no matter how good it had been. If Dylan chose to sweep it under the rug, he chose right, even if it hurt.

Hayden climbed out of bed and looked for something to wear. The robe he'd left downstairs had reappeared, hung on the wardrobe door handle and he shrugged into it before he went to shower.

With his hair still wet, he made his way downstairs. Dylan turned the radio down a little when he appeared and gestured Hayden to the table, where two plates of scrambled eggs were laid out, as well as a mound of toast between them, together with two mugs of coffee and two glasses of orange juice.

Hayden sat. He gulped some juice thirstily.

"How's your head this morning? We polished off a good amount of wine last night." Dylan sat down, grinning.

"A little delicate." God, was Dylan going to act as though nothing had happened? Hayden glanced through the kitchen window at the relentless snow

outside.

Dylan followed his gaze. "I have to go to work in half an hour. Stay here and I'll get your car towed to the garage and fixed. While I'm out, I'll assess the road out of here and give you a call. It's still not looking good, though."

Hayden nodded. "Thanks."

"I'll need your car keys."

"Yeah."

"If you want to call work, tell them you won't be in…"

"I've got my cell, thanks."

"Okay."

They ate in silence. Dylan got up to remove the dishes. He stacked them by the sink, put the carton of orange juice back in the fridge. Finally he sighed, turned to look at Hayden.

"Look, last night…"

Hayden's stomach churned. He waited.

"That wasn't me. That's not how I normally behave. I don't usually take what I want and to hell with the consequences. You must think I'm a callous prick, but I'm not. I usually tiptoe around people's feelings, I usually go out of my way not to hurt anyone. I've *never* tangled with a married guy before and I never thought I would. I'm sorry."

Hayden swallowed. "It's not like I didn't match you every step of the way. You don't have to feel guilty for taking what I offered. It was my fault. I did it to her, not you."

Dylan looked deeply unhappy, stricken, as though he knew this faceless woman whose husband he had stolen. "Why wasn't she with you at the wedding?"

"We… had a fight. She refused to come."

"Was it serious?"

"I don't know. Maybe." Hayden lifted his head, realising how his words sounded. "It's not… I didn't do that last night out of any sort of revenge. I hope you believe that."

Dylan folded his arms and leaned against the counter, watching him carefully. "Why did you do it, then?"

"I wanted you." Hayden's voice was small, his confidence gone.

"How long have you wanted to play around with men?"

"A long time. Since my late teens."

"And you never have?"

"No. I never even kissed a man before last night."

A grim smile twisted Dylan's sensual mouth but didn't extend to his eyes. "I should feel flattered."

"But you don't? Are you mad at me?"

"Why would I be?"

"I don't know. You knew the deal."

Dylan nodded slowly. "Yeah, I knew the deal. I knew you weren't mine to have."

Hayden got up from the table. "Come on. Don't."

"Will you remember it?" Dylan asked. "When you're gone."

Hayden's throat was closed by a lump. "Yes," he said. "Always."

Dylan turned and walked out of the kitchen.

Hayden was still sitting, drinking his coffee and brooding, when Dylan returned to the kitchen, fully dressed in uniform. Hayden glanced at the badge on his chest, the gun rubbing one lean hip, and swore he would have a uniform fetish forever and a day after this.

Dylan shrugged on his parka. He took a cell from his pocket. "Give me your number."

Hayden recited it and watched the deputy's thumb move deftly over the keys. He pocketed it, zipped up his parka. "Give you a call later. Help yourself to anything you want." Dylan took the car keys Hayden had left on the edge of the table.

Still Hayden marvelled that Dylan would leave a stranger alone in his

house. But Dylan was rather more intimate with Hayden now than he had been twelve hours ago. Perhaps they were strangers, but they knew each other's bodies well.

His face heated at his thoughts. He went back to drinking his coffee as Dylan walked away.

Hayden heard the engine start but the car didn't drive away immediately. There came the sound of metal scraping on concrete and he got up, went into the living room to glance through the window.

Dylan was using his shovel to free his back tyres from the snow piled against them so he could reverse off the drive. Hayden opened the door, stunned as a gust of frigid air buffeted him back.

"Want me to help?"

Dylan looked up. "No. Go back inside."

Hayden should have known by now that Dylan didn't seem the type of guy to accept help on anything but that didn't make him feel any better, sitting inside drinking Dylan's coffee, while the cop froze his ass off outside.

"Come on, have you got another shovel?"

Dylan paused a moment in his work, his pale face flushed with cold and exertion. "I said go back inside, Hayden." His tone was stony, as were his eyes.

Hayden retreated back inside, nearly slamming the door.

Outside, Dylan stopped and wiped his hand over his forehead. No way was he letting Hayden come out into the cold and help; he'd seen how bad his limp was last night when he'd been out in the snow a few minutes by his broken-down car. Even when Hayden had straddled his lap last night, Dylan had felt him wince in pain. Thinking of that made his blood heat with sudden passion. His cock stiffened beneath three layers as it remembered, too. Oh God, taking a stranger from the side of the road into his house and then into his bed. And Dylan didn't regret a single minute of it, apart from the fact Hayden was married. He scowled at the house, his ardour cooling. It would be better if the roads were

passable today and Hayden could get away. Leaving this as a one-night stand would be best for them both. If Hayden had to stay tonight, it would become a two-night stand, that wasn't in doubt. Dylan wouldn't keep his hands off him tonight. Not now that he knew how good it was.

Hayden threw himself onto the couch and reached for his bag. His cell phone was in the outer pocket where he'd shoved it last night, dead. He dragged his charger from the bag and went into the kitchen, plugging the phone in at one of the sockets over the counter. He switched it on as it started to charge, waited for it to ready itself.

He dreaded what he'd find on it. It was unforgivable of him not to have phoned Julianna last night, no matter how pissed he was at her. She probably thought he was dead in a ditch somewhere.

The text messages started to roll in. Several from Julianna, a couple from his partners at the dental practice, Avril and Rose, one from the friend who had gotten married and was now on his honeymoon. He tackled the voice messages from his wife, the first icy and calm, telling him he could go to hell for not coming back and hoping he was screwing a bridesmaid to his heart's content. The second near hysterical and tearful.

He called her.

"It's me. I'm okay. The car broke down."

"You bastard. You bastard!" Julianna sobbed loudly.

"Don't, honey."

"Don't honey *me*. You go to that wedding without me, you don't call me for two days while you're there and then you let me think you're dead somewhere. Is this how you get back at me?"

"No."

"Where are you?"

"Somewhere in South Dakota. Somewhere very cold. I had a blowout, crashed my car, got picked up by a cop who let me spend the night at his house."

Was that convincing? Hayden's face flamed as it always did when he lied. Still, it wasn't a lie, it was an omission of the pertinent facts.

"When are you coming home?"

"I hope today. He's gone out to check the roads and sort out my car."

"He's a very charitable man, your policeman."

Hayden held his breath. As far as he knew, Julianna had never caught one whiff of him liking men, at least none that she'd admitted to him anyway. "Yes, he is."

"You went home with some strange guy in the middle of nowhere? He might have been some rapist and murderer."

Can't rape the willing. "Julianna…"

"He might have worn your skin as a suit."

His wife watched too many extreme films. "Okay, honey, that'll do. This isn't the *Texas Chainsaw Massacre*. He's a cop. He was hospitable and I was grateful." *More grateful than you'll know. He introduced me to the side of myself I've hidden from forever.* "I'll call you once I know about the roads, okay?"

"Okay and Hayden, don't ever do that to me again."

"I'm sorry, baby." Hayden hesitated. "I love you."

"I love you too, honeybun and don't forget it." Julianna hung up.

Hayden put his cell on the counter. He was the biggest shit that ever lived. He listened. The scraping had stopped and Dylan had gone, leaving perfect silence behind.

CHAPTER FOUR

Hayden shifted restlessly on the couch, his ass hurting when he moved. He had called his partners at work and told them he had no idea if he could make it back today. Then he'd emptied the clean plates from the dishwasher and stacked the breakfast dishes in it, wiping the table and counters with a cloth. It had been two hours now and still no phone call. Surely Dylan knew the state of the roads by now. He was fully dressed and ready to go the moment the deputy gave the word. *That's right, run away, you coward.*

Boots lay curled on the opposite couch, deeply asleep. Hayden sighed, sinking back, taking some deep breaths. When he closed his eyes he saw himself on his back, Dylan driving into him, making Hayden spill like no one ever had before. Oh God, what was he going to do? How could he go home a faithless liar to Julianna and how could he ever forget how last night had made him come alive?

His cell vibrated suddenly in his lap and he snatched it up. The number on the readout was unknown to him. "Hello?"

"Hi, it's Dylan. I got your car towed to the garage. They're working on it now. "

"Great."

"Yeah. Listen, the road to the highway's completely closed by snow."

Hayden's heart sank.

"Looks like you're going to be my guest for one more night."

"You need to find me a hotel." Hayden's tone sounded panicked to himself, as well it might. He knew what would happen if he stayed another night with Dylan.

"There aren't any. The Iceman Festival runs five days and no one can leave anyway. Sorry."

Hayden was silent.

"Are you okay?"

"Yeah." Hayden breathed out slowly.

"Look, I'll try and knock off early, okay?"

"Sure."

"Rest your leg." Dylan hung up.

Hayden leaned back, holding his cell. *Shit*. If he'd left today at least he could have called Dylan a one-night stand. But tonight, one would become two. He wouldn't have any willpower to resist. He knew that.

Sometime before four, as the murky white sky darkened, Hayden's leg started to hurt him. He took a couple of his painkillers, lay back on Dylan's couch with a cushion propped beneath his knee, and tried to breathe slowly and deeply through the pain. He had been reading a novel off Dylan's shelf—*The Alchemist* by Paolo Coelho—but now he placed it on his lap, unable to concentrate with the needle-like stabs into his calf.

After half an hour, the tablets had barely taken the edge off. He reached into his bag and took out the amitriptyline. He shouldn't, he knew that. They were supposed to be for night and he didn't want Dylan to find him drugged up and drowsy when he got home, but what was a person supposed to do? Hayden wasn't a martyr to his pain. He believed in dealing with it quickly as best he could and after seven years it was a pain he was sick to death of dealing with.

He swallowed the tablet with the glass of water he'd left on the coffee table. He tried to calm himself but removing his mind from the pain only brought him back to what he was doing here and what had happened on this couch last night, right where he lay. Oh God, never had infidelity entered his head, even as a concept. Never had he looked at another woman. He'd looked at another man, of course, but never once taken steps to bring fantasy to fruition. Why now? Why Dylan?

Because you had the opportunity, a sly voice whispered. But he knew it was more than that. He wouldn't have done it with just any man. The man he'd finally succumb to, break his wedding vows for, had to be something special.

And he was.

Hayden squeezed his eyes shut and dug his nails into his palms as he remembered hot skin sliding against his own, lips burning him alive. Oh God, he had to have it again, just once.

Dylan arrived back with a bag of vegetables for dinner and a bottle of wine. He told himself the wine wasn't to loosen Hayden up into the kind of pliable state he'd gotten him into last night, but he wasn't sure he believed it.

He opened the front door, put his bags down, and took off his boots, then discarded his waterproof pants, his jacket, scarf, hat. The house was cosy and his cheeks and nose started to sting as the heat caressed them. He crossed the living room, stopping when he saw Hayden stretched out on the couch, asleep. A book lay face down on his chest. There were a couple of packets of painkillers on the carpet beside him.

His leg again. What must it be like to live with the kind of chronic pain Hayden did, at his age? It would no doubt last the rest of his life. Dylan knew he wouldn't be able to deal with it himself. It would drive him insane. He walked quietly past Hayden and took the bags into the kitchen.

Sounds of movement brought Hayden out of his snooze. Unless burglars these days broke in and started chopping vegetables in the kitchen as well as looting, then Dylan must be back. He stretched, groaning at the flash of fire that shot through his leg.

Dylan appeared at the kitchen door, still wearing his uniform. "Hey."

"Hello."

"You okay?"

"Yeah."

"Looks like it was for the best that you didn't go today. A long drive wouldn't have done your leg any favours, I'm guessing."

"I suppose not," Hayden muttered. He adjusted the pillow under his leg, wincing.

Dylan approached the couch. "Does massage help?"

Hayden shrugged. "Sometimes."

"Scoot over, then." Dylan perched on the couch and started rolling Hayden's jeans leg up.

Hayden shrank away. "It's fine."

"Let me." Their eyes met. Dylan's face seemed open and honest, earnest even. There didn't seem to be an ulterior motive to his request.

But if Hayden had those hands on him again, he would want the rest. All Dylan could provide.

Dylan stretched Hayden's leg out and ran his hands slowly up the muscle of his calf. Hayden shivered. A jolt of electricity seemed to spear him. He clenched his teeth, leaning back.

Dylan's gentle hands started to massage, kneading the muscle, fingertips trailing lightly over the scar. It both hurt and aroused Hayden. He felt both pain and pleasure from Dylan's skilful hands.

"Are you okay? Am I hurting you?"

"I'm okay."

"Should I keep going?"

"Yes."

"Does your foot hurt, too?"

"Yes."

Dylan pulled Hayden's sock off. He pressed his thumbs into the sole of Hayden's foot, kneading firmly.

Hayden caught his breath. A wave of heat engulfed his leg. He shuddered. Dylan's hands enclosed his foot, stroking the arch, instep, and toes, moving to his ankle, massaging rhythmically all the while.

Hayden closed his eyes. The pain throbbed its way into regression. It felt like Dylan's fingers were all over his leg at once. It felt like no one, not Julianna, not his physical therapist, had ever known just what to do. It was exactly what Hayden needed.

A whimper slipped past his lips before he could stop it. He wished he could take Dylan's hands home and keep them forever.

"Is that okay?"

"Yes. Oh, you're good."

"Thank you. You'll tell me if it's too much?"

"I don't want you to stop, Dylan. Please don't stop."

"I won't. Whatever you want."

Hayden breathed deeply. Dylan fingered the scar, turned it pliable and soft. "Have you done this before?"

"Massaged someone? Sure. But in a different way. Not to take away pain."

Hayden knew what he meant. He had given massages in a sexual way, the purpose being to arouse, not like this. He imagined other men being treated to Dylan's wonderful hands, how they must have been putty at the end of it.

"You should do it professionally."

Dylan laughed. "I've got some oil upstairs. Can I go and get it?"

Hayden opened his eyes. He didn't want to lose that contact of skin on his for one moment but he nodded. The massage would be even better with some slick.

He waited, trying not to think of the other men Dylan might have used the oil on. The pain muttered sullenly to him, trying to take hold again without Dylan's magic to ward it off.

Dylan reappeared. He sat down on the couch, tipping a dark glass bottle into his hands. Sweet scents filled the air: rosemary, jasmine, ylang ylang. Hayden knew the latter was an aphrodisiac, all right, Julianna used it often enough. But now was not the time for thinking about his wife. He turned his face away, an arm over his eyes as though he could blot out her image.

Dylan rubbed his hands together. He smoothed them firmly down Hayden's calf to his ankle and beyond, over his foot. Heat invaded Hayden's aching tissues. Pain struck him in multiple small darts, as though it warred with Dylan against its exorcism. Hayden moaned. He thrashed his head from side to side, biting his lip.

"I'm hurting you." Dylan stopped.

"No you're not. It's wonderful. Please, it's going. Just a little bit longer." Hayden reached down, put a hand over Dylan's. Their gazes met and Hayden

saw Dylan's golden eyes darken unmistakeably. If it hadn't been sexual before, now it was. The cop wanted him. Hayden's cock stirred.

Dylan slid both hands up to Hayden's knee, and kneaded slowly back down the calf, tracing the scar. The slick, pliable skin shifted easily under his fingers as the muscles released their tightness, their agony.

"Oh, God." Hayden arched beneath Dylan's touch. The release of pain became hopelessly arousing. He saw the reaction on Dylan's face, the way his tongue darted out to moisten his lips, the thickening in his pants.

Dylan's hands captured his foot again. He shifted back so he could rest Hayden's foot on his lap. His fingers sent shockwaves up his leg, his thigh, all the way up to Hayden's groin. He shifted on the couch, spreading his legs. Flexing his foot, his toes came into contact with hardness. He looked down.

Dylan kept his fingers massaging Hayden's instep as his foot rested against the bulge in his pants. He smiled. "Sorry."

Hayden didn't reply. He pressed deliberately, tracing the thick outline with his toes.

Dylan shifted. "Let's not get distracted," he said. He turned his attention back to Hayden's calf but while he rubbed, Hayden continued to massage his crotch with his foot.

Dylan drew his breath in. Hayden watched from below his lashes. He felt languid and drowsy. It was the tablets, he knew, but after a particularly bad spell of pain, he was always left drained, exhausted, barely capable of anything. Today might be different, though. The solid heat pressing against his foot told Hayden he could have it if he wanted it and God, he did.

The pain ebbed away. Hayden breathed slow and easy. A different kind of ache settled in his groin. He reached down again, touched Dylan's hand. "You're wonderful."

Dylan looked up at him, his pupils dilated, overwhelming the gold of his iris. "No, *you're* wonderful." His voice was low and breathy. He turned his hand over, entwined his fingers with Hayden's. "Has it gone?"

"More or less."

Dylan lifted Hayden's hand and pressed a tender kiss to the palm. Then, as Hayden was still catching his breath, Dylan shifted up the couch, leaned down, and lowered his mouth over Hayden's.

Hayden had been full of wine last night. He now knew that experiencing Dylan's kiss while sober was even better. He put an arm around Dylan's neck, pulling him closer, and Dylan sank onto him, between his legs, groin to hard groin.

Hayden writhed in delirious bliss at the weight on him. He didn't feel any pain in his right leg as he wrapped it around Dylan's hip, rocking deliberately against him, holding Dylan greedily to him.

Dylan cursed under his breath. He slid abruptly down Hayden's body, pushing his sweater up, attacking his torso with passionate kisses, right up to his collarbone and then back down, to his navel and the line of dark hair that disappeared below his pants. The heel of one of Dylan's hands ground deliberately against his hardness as Dylan dispensed of his belt quickly and unfastened his pants.

Hayden held his breath in excitement, groaning as fingers freed him from his boxers, slid down his length and then held him steady. A moment later, wet heat engulfed him.

Hayden arched in shock and pleasure, looking down at Dylan's swiftly sucking mouth. Dylan regarded him steadily from under thick lashes. Oh God, he shouldn't be doing this, he shouldn't. But Hayden was helpless to pull away. He was pinned to the couch by the force of his desire, just as strong as it had been last night.

Dylan drew back. He ran his tongue the length of Hayden's shaft, played it over the head of his cock, pressed it against the slit. Hayden clenched his fists. He controlled the urge to lift his pelvis, to guide his cock back into Dylan's perfect mouth.

He closed his eyes as the tongue teased, delved, flicked, before hands

gripped his clothes, dragging. Hayden lifted his backside willingly so Dylan could pull his pants and boxers down to mid-thigh. Then the tongue was on his scrotum, licking delicately before Dylan's lips closed, sucking at one ball.

A strangled sound came from Hayden's throat. He groaned overtly when Dylan swallowed him back down, Hayden's balls in his palm, his fingers squeezing lightly.

God, he knew what to do. There was nothing about Dylan which wasn't supremely confident and masterful. Thank God Hayden's first foray into gay sex wasn't in the hands of an amateur. Or an asshole interested only in his own pleasure. Dylan seemed far more interested in Hayden's.

The steadily sucking mouth drew him inexorably toward climax. Was Dylan going to take him all the way like this? Hayden hardly dared hope. What man didn't want to get off this way? Hayden had never had anyone swallow him though. Julianna didn't like it and if it was so unpleasant he'd better make sure he stopped Dylan in time, too. He was nothing if not a gentleman.

He heard himself moaning. He gripped Dylan by the hair, playing with his silky locks, raking his fingers through them, stroking the nape of his neck. Dylan increased his pace. He sucked with further eagerness, like he had all the stamina in the world. He massaged Hayden's sac carefully, gently, fingers wandering over his inner thighs, touching on the sensitive skin behind his balls, stroking with infinite care.

Hayden's body tightened. He shifted, spreading his legs further, lifting his pelvis helplessly. A spasm of pain shot through his leg but he paid it no heed. Dylan's mouth was the only thing that mattered.

Dylan's hand slid up his torso and Hayden arched under his touch. His lover's fingers closed over one nipple, rubbing, tweaking ever so slightly, never anything less than gentle.

"Fuck." Hayden clasped Dylan's hand, holding it to his breast, gasping as the orgasm rolled over him. He pushed Dylan's head back quickly but Dylan stuck doggedly to his task. He sucked harder, faster, leaving Hayden in no doubt

as to what he wanted.

Hayden cried out. He trembled uncontrollably, fingers clenched in Dylan's hair, shuddering, shaking for long seconds before he fell back gasping.

Dylan slid slowly off him. His tongue lapped at the sensitive head of Hayden's cock, drawing exquisite aftershocks from him. He squirmed, reached for Dylan's shoulder, and pulled him forward.

Dylan slid up his body, settled his weight half-on half-off Hayden. His lips sought Hayden's throat, planting delicate kisses.

"Oh God, Dylan." Hayden threw an arm around his back, holding him hard. "Fuck, you're something else."

Dylan laughed softly. He drew his lips across Hayden's lingeringly. "Did I make you forget about your leg?"

"Yes."

"And about being stranded here?"

Hayden looked away. He didn't speak. His continuing infidelity slapped him in the face.

"Hey." Dylan brushed some strands of hair back from his forehead before he kissed him on the temple. "Did you speak to your wife?"

Hayden nodded.

"Was she upset?"

"Yeah. I'll have to call her again. Tell her I won't be home today."

Dylan was silent a moment. Hayden looked into his eyes. The lust had retreated from them; the iris was clear and golden. Dylan climbed up off the couch. The straining against his pants was still visible. "I'll carry on with dinner."

"Hey." Hayden caught his hand. "Don't you want me to…?" He gestured wordlessly. Hayden wasn't a selfish man, never had been.

"I'm good." Dylan walked away.

Hayden fastened himself up. Then he lay there in quiet contemplation for a few minutes before he reached for his cell, thumbed through the address book, waited for it to connect.

"Hayden, honey, are you okay?"

"Hi, baby. I'm fine. I'm sorry, I've got some bad news for you."

"Oh no."

"I'm snowed in for today. Hopefully it'll be better tomorrow."

Julianna sighed. "I miss you."

"I miss you too." Hayden glanced toward the kitchen.

"The fight we had, it was stupid. I want you to know how sorry I am."

"I'm sorry, too. I shouldn't have gone without you."

"It doesn't matter. Make it up to me when you get home."

"I will."

"Are you still staying with the cop?"

"Yeah."

"He's very generous."

"Yes, he is." *More than you'd imagine.*

"You'll have to let me thank him. Is he there?"

"No, he's at work."

"Another time, then. Call me tomorrow."

"I will, baby."

"I love you."

"Bye, honey." Hayden hung up. He squeezed his eyes shut, his lies sour in his mouth.

CHAPTER FIVE

In the kitchen, Dylan leaned against the counter, pausing in his chopping. Was it wrong that he was jealous of the endearments he'd heard come off Hayden's tongue? Of course it was. Hayden was a stranger, someone Dylan had met last night and sated his desire with, nothing more, nothing less. It didn't matter that Hayden's cock in his mouth made him throb insanely with desire or that the touch of his lips sent him senseless with need. It was only lust, that's all it was. *Let's not make it into the love affair of the century. This isn't The Bridges of Madison County.*

He jumped as arms wrapped around his waist and a chin leaned against his shoulder.

"You made me feel so good," Hayden whispered against his ear, stirring Dylan's mind into all kinds of wickedness.

He tried to get his thoughts back on track, back into peevish resentment. "Why did you tell your wife I was at work?"

Hayden sighed. His lips touched the sensitive spot behind Dylan's ear. He nuzzled a moment. "She wanted to thank you for h-having me."

Dylan smirked humourlessly. "I'm sure she did. Worried I was going to tell her I'd just sucked your cock?"

Hayden tightened his arms, burying his face in Dylan's shoulder blade. "Don't."

"I'm sorry, does my language offend you?"

"Yes. It doesn't suit you. You're a gentleman."

Dylan clenched his jaw. "Yeah well, maybe I don't much feel like being a gentleman at the moment." He turned around, pulled Hayden flush against him and kissed him, hard.

He felt Hayden melt; his lover clutched him around the neck and returned the kiss, breathless with passion. They stumbled back, lip-locked. Dylan lifted Hayden onto the edge of the table, pushed his legs apart, and ravished his neck with kisses.

Hayden's hand made short work of Dylan's uniform pants, pulling them

open, freeing Dylan's cock. Dylan wouldn't have thought the guy would be so bold. He'd thought Hayden's homosexual experimentation last night was all about the wine. Maybe he was wrong. He groaned as Hayden slid his aching shaft through his palm, jerking him firmly, his fingers tight.

Dylan pushed into Hayden's hand, seeking his mouth again, devouring it, caressing Hayden's tongue with his. His fingers sought Hayden's hair. He played with the dark auburn strands, relished in the silky touch. He nuzzled Hayden's neck again, pants for breath escaping him as he got close.

Hayden's pace increased. One hand slid down Dylan's open trousers, into his boxers, gripping one buttock greedily. Dylan bucked forward. He stared into the pale blue-green eyes of his lover a moment before his face fell against Hayden's throat and he kissed adoringly as he came.

Hayden held him close a moment. His lips feathered gently over Dylan's eyebrow. The tenderness between them both at that moment was something exquisite. Was this really the man he had only met last night? Dylan drew his hand down Hayden's back. He caught his cheek with one hand and kissed him, slowly, deeply.

Hayden responded. They stood entwined for long moments before, finally, Hayden drew back, slid from the table to go to the sink and wash his hands. Dylan watched him covertly. Hayden turned to him and smiled hesitantly and in that moment, Dylan wished fervently that the road home would remain forever blocked with snow.

They sat eating, the bottle of wine open and poured. Dylan was a good cook and he only made nutritious vegetarian food. Tonight it was a vegetable gratin with warm crusty bread. Dylan broke the silence.

"How long have you been married?"

"Five years."

Dylan lifted an eyebrow. "How old are you?"

"Twenty-five."

"You got married young."

"Yes."

"Any children?"

"No."

"In the cards?"

Hayden shrugged. He took a drink of wine. He still felt drowsy, even more so now. The pain nudged at his leg, gave him a malicious stab to remind him it was still there. He hoped to anaesthetise it with wine but all that had done last night was land him on his back, under his host.

He held Dylan's golden gaze. Would it be so bad to do it a second time? He was ashamed of himself. Had he no self-control at all?

"You don't like me talking about your wife."

"No."

Dylan topped his wine up.

"Are you trying to get me drunk?"

"Do I need to?"

Hayden regarded him for the longest moment with heat swarming through every cell in his body before he gave a small shake of his head. There. He might as well have given Dylan carte blanche.

Dylan reached across the table. He stroked Hayden's fingers with that gentle touch he always employed.

"How's your leg?" Dylan asked as Hayden helped him stack dishes in the dishwasher.

"So-so."

"Do you need another massage?"

"I know what your massages lead to."

"Are you complaining?" Dylan grinned.

Hayden felt himself blush. "No."

"Good."

"Can I take a bath?"

"Sure you can, you don't need to ask. Go on, I'll finish up here."

"Thanks."

Hayden ran the water hot. He slid into scented bubbles and drifted away. When he got out, he was going to go to bed with Dylan, he knew that. He only wished he could stop himself.

A tap came at the door. "Are you okay in there?"

Hayden jerked awake. The cooling water told him how long he'd been in. "Yeah."

"Can I come in?"

Hayden hesitated. "Sure."

Dylan entered. He came over to the bath, smiling at Hayden. "You sure like your baths."

"I'm sorry."

"I'm kidding." Dylan bent and put his hand in the water. "Going cold, though." He turned on the hot tap.

Hayden lay uncomfortably, bubbles still just about covering his groin.

"Want to do another first with a man?" Dylan asked. "Want to take a bath with me?"

Hayden stared a moment. But what did it matter? He had been naked before with Dylan and he would be naked again. They had hardly finished whatever was going on between them yet. He sat up and slid wordlessly forward, watching out of the corner of his eye while Dylan stripped.

He saw long, strong legs before Dylan climbed in behind him, opening his legs around him. Hayden sank back against his chest; Dylan's arms wrapped loosely around his torso.

"Mmm." Dylan swirled around the new water with one foot. "That's nice."

Hayden closed his eyes as the water steadily heated and lulled him away again. Dylan's embrace felt so good, so soothing, so… safe.

Lips touched his neck. Hayden shivered. He put a hand up to touch the black dragon on Dylan's bicep, tracing tail, claws, scales, and the muscle beneath the ink. His hand settled on Dylan's. The deputy held it, entwining their fingers. He planted light kisses on Hayden's jaw, sucking gently at his earlobe.

"You're beautiful." It was a whisper.

Hayden had always done all right with women until his accident. Then he had locked himself away until Julianna had come calling and he had been lucky enough that she saw past the scar. He didn't consider himself beautiful in any way.

"No."

"Yes. Inside and out."

"You don't know me."

"I know enough." Dylan's arms tightened. "I consider myself lucky you broke down in my town."

"Don't. I'm a liar and a cheat and what we're doing is wrong. Don't say that like you think your soulmate just walked in the door." It was too much. Emotion overwhelmed Hayden. He squeezed his eyes shut, turned his face as far into Dylan's shoulder as he could.

A wet hand stroked his hair. Dylan didn't say anything.

They got out of the bath, drying themselves. Hayden brushed his teeth. He went into the bedroom and located the T-shirt and pyjama pants he had worn last night. He put them on and slid between the cool covers of Dylan's bed. He lay there waiting, with sleep coming quickly.

Dylan moved around in the bathroom. He went downstairs for a few minutes. Hayden heard the click of the front door locking, the safety chain rattling into place.

He was almost asleep when Dylan climbed in beside him. Hayden turned away, onto his side. Dylan waited a moment and then he curled up behind him, one arm over Hayden. Hayden felt for his fingers in the dark. They didn't speak.

CHAPTER SIX

Hayden woke to a grey dawn, heat and hardness pressed behind him. As he stirred, so did the hand on his abdomen. Dylan's fingers slid up under his T-shirt, stroking his belly in slow circles. A mouth pressed behind his ear.

"Morning."

"Morning." Hayden usually woke up hard and today was no exception. But the kiss and the touch sent instant flames of arousal darting in all different directions over his needy body, to centre between his legs. He shifted, aching.

Dylan's hand moved upward. His index finger rubbed at one nipple. Hayden caught his breath. He put his head back so Dylan could mouth his neck and then he reached behind him to grip a muscular thigh.

Dylan let out a low growl. He pressed closer, his cock grinding against Hayden's backside through the thin material which clothed them both. "I want you." It was a breathy whisper in his ear, lifting goosebumps the length of Hayden's body.

Hayden pulled his pyjama pants down. He guided Dylan's hand shamelessly into his groin. Dylan murmured his approval against Hayden's ear. His palm slid down Hayden's shaft, stroking, his thumb tracing around the head. Hayden groaned. He turned his head and Dylan leaned over him, capturing his mouth, his other hand tangling in Hayden's hair.

They kissed deeply, swapping tongues and breath while Dylan milked Hayden's cock slowly, firmly.

Then Dylan slid away. Hayden glanced back to see him rooting in the bedside drawer. He remained on his side, waiting, anticipation thrumming through his blood.

A hand stroked his buttocks and Hayden shivered. Dylan pushed one knee up. Wet fingers slid down his cleft, stroking. Hayden shivered and jumped. His entrance located, Dylan rubbed cold wetness slowly over and around it, while his lips found the back of Hayden's neck.

Hayden trembled with need. Dylan discarded his own pyjama bottoms. He yanked off Hayden's T-shirt and then he tore open a condom, rolling it on quickly. He smoothed a hand over Hayden's hip, kissed him at the nape of his neck and then slowly pushed into him.

Hayden breathed hard, willing himself to relax, to take all of Dylan. He gasped, impaled, twisting his upper body around to hook an arm around Dylan's neck. They could kiss perfectly like this as Dylan moved into him, a hand still on Hayden's cock, Dylan's body curled tightly against his.

Their skin stuck together; their mouths melded as one. Hayden thought this must be as close as he would ever come to another person, Dylan almost becoming part of him, so closely were they fused.

The hot mouth swallowed his cries. Dylan didn't break his easy, rocking rhythm, didn't once falter in those strokes to Hayden's straining cock. Oh God, he needed this, he needed it like the air in his lungs.

Dylan's left hand cradled his head as they kissed, caressing it. His right hand let go of Hayden's cock to run the length of his torso, exploring with feather-light fingertips, making Hayden arch in pleasure.

He nuzzled Hayden's throat, pressing deeper, harder, as Hayden drew closer to his peak and became noisier.

He clutched at his own cock, almost at the edge. Dylan pushed his hand away. He jerked Hayden off expertly, another four or five strokes and then Hayden stiffened, bucked, his toes curling, shuddering hard all over, as he spurted.

Dylan hissed against his ear, writhing in the grip of his own climax before he slowed, moving languorously as each of them rode out their orgasm.

Hayden lay there in the afterglow with Dylan's mouth against his neck and his hand still around him. He didn't want to ever go home.

Finally, Dylan moved first. He slid away and left for the bathroom. Hayden leaned over, grabbed a few tissues from the bedside table and wiped

himself off. The clock said eight; he guessed Dylan would soon be leaving for work.

Footsteps sounded. "Want some breakfast?"

Hayden turned onto his back to see Dylan pulling on a robe. "Sure."

Dylan nodded and left the room. Hayden dragged himself out of bed. His leg pained him when he stood up. He pulled on his robe and went to the bathroom to wash.

Dylan had toast and eggs ready on the table, coffee and orange juice. Hayden sat down, gulping a couple of his painkillers with juice. He buttered some toast, waiting politely until Dylan sat down before he started eating.

"Fingers crossed for the road being open today, huh?" Dylan said.

Hayden nodded. Rather than look at Dylan, he watched Boots eating his own breakfast.

"You never say much after we…"

Hayden's gaze moved to his. "What do you want me to say?"

"I don't know."

"Marks out of ten, that kind of thing?"

Dylan frowned at his flippancy. He got up from the table.

Hayden caught his wrist, staying him, looking up into his eyes. "Eleven," he said.

A small smile twitched Dylan's mouth. He threaded his fingers through Hayden's hair. Hayden put an arm around his waist, pulling his lover closer so he could rest his face against his chest, listening to the steady beat of his heart.

Dylan was ready for work, parka zipped up, checking that his gloves were in his pockets. Hayden sat on the couch, his right leg outstretched. Dylan leaned down and ran his palm lightly over the scar. "Wish I could stay here and give you a massage."

"It's okay. I'll get Boots to do it."

Dylan smiled. "I'll call you about the road."

Hayden nodded. "Have a nice day."

Dylan cupped his head, bent, kissed him. "Take it easy."

"You can count on that."

He watched Dylan pull his boots on at the door, pull his hat over his ears, and then he was gone with a farewell raise of his hand.

Hayden made no move to get dressed or get his things together. It wasn't a case that he believed the road would still be closed, but more that he simply didn't want to go anywhere.

Boots jumped onto the couch, purring, cuddling up to him, and Hayden lay down, stroking Dylan's cat and hating himself more with every passing minute.

His cell shrilled him out of sleep. Boots stirred, stretched, blinked at him with large green eyes as Hayden reached down and plucked the phone from the carpet.

"Hey."

"Hi, Hayden. You're in luck."

"What?"

"The road. It's been cleared. Traffic's good on the highway. No more snow forecast for today."

Silence hung on the line between them.

"Are you there?"

"Yeah. Thanks."

"Okay, so if you get ready I'll come for you, drop you off at the garage. It'll be about an hour. Got to make a call."

"All right. See you in a bit."

"Yeah." Dylan hung up.

Hayden lay back still holding his phone. No, a voice told him inside. *No*. He jumped when the phone went off again. *Julianna calling.*

"Hi," he answered. "I was just going to call you."

"You were?"

"Yes, good news. I'll be on the road in about an hour."

Julianna squealed. "Oh, thank God."

"So I'll see you soon. Got to get ready."

"Okay, baby. Love you."

Hayden hung up. He looked blankly at Boots with pain drumming up and down his leg, rising throughout his body to centre in the left side of his chest. It blossomed with surprising speed, turning into flames, consuming him whole.

He was sitting, waiting, when Dylan came for him. He shrugged on his parka as the cop came through the door, kicking off his boots.

"You ready?"

"Yeah."

Dylan reached for his bag.

"Got to warn you, the damage is steep at the garage. It's going to hurt your credit card."

Hayden shrugged.

"And they put you a spare in the trunk. So you don't end up having to stay at any more cops' houses."

"That's a shame," Hayden replied. "Was going to see if I could sleep my way around the state."

Dylan grabbed him in a playful headlock, rubbing his knuckles on Hayden's hair. "Okay smartass, let's go. I've got your bag."

Hayden petted Boots, who remained reclined on the couch. "Bye, Boots. See you around."

He put his hat on, then went to the doormat to pull his boots on. Dylan went out to his car with Hayden's bag. The engine was still running, exhaust fumes clouding the cold, still air behind the vehicle.

Hayden climbed in beside Dylan. For a moment the deputy turned his head, those golden eyes fixing on his. The look that passed between them would stay in Hayden's mind for a long time to come.

Dylan set off. They drove in silence down the road. The day was bright and crisp. The road was ploughed. Snow ten feet high lay neatly packed along its edges. It was a couple of miles until civilisation appeared, rows of stores on both sides, the police station looming large over them all.

Dylan pulled over to the side of the road before they reached any of the buildings, clicking open his seatbelt. "Garage is just up on the left," he said.

Silence fell. It was kind of obvious why Dylan had pulled over. Hayden released his seat belt. Then he leaned over and held the deputy sheriff hard.

Dylan pulled him close, a hand working its way beneath Hayden's layers to smooth down his naked back, his other hand holding his head. He nosed Hayden's hair. "I won't forget you."

Hayden tightened his arms. His eyes and throat burned with the need to let out his distress. He held back the emotion with every ounce of his strength. *Not here. Not in front of him.*

There were things he wanted to say to Dylan, words that wanted to spill but he kept them furiously prisoner behind his teeth and tongue. Nothing he could say now could do either of them any good. This… affair, if that's what it was, was all done. They were going back to their lives, a life for Hayden that included the wife he had cynically deceived and that somehow, he had to look in the eye when he got back home. A life without Dylan, this interlude in his once-peaceful existence. But Dylan had blown him wide open. Hayden knew his life was changed for good and he knew he would never, ever forget this man.

He clasped Dylan's face and kissed him. Dylan's fingers played over the nape of his neck. He matched Hayden's passion kiss for kiss.

They broke contact after long minutes, leaving both of them breathless. Dylan's lips brushed Hayden's temple, his jaw, his ear. His hand was gentle on Hayden's head, touching him with such tenderness.

He sighed, releasing Hayden. "Come on. Let's go."

Hayden sat back. He stared blindly out of the window as Dylan set off again, pulling up in front of a garage. He killed the engine, then got out and took

Hayden's bag from the trunk.

Hayden's right leg buckled as he stepped out of the car. He grabbed the roof, steadying himself, breathing through the pain.

"Are you okay?" Dylan asked in concern behind him.

"Yeah."

"Are you sure you're going to be okay to drive? Maybe I should drive you home."

Hayden turned to look at him. *My lover driving me back to my wife? I don't think so. Worst idea in the history of bad ideas.*

Dylan gave him a rueful smile, clearly reading his thoughts. He set off toward the garage and Hayden followed him. Dylan greeted the short, plump guy in overalls at the door. They shook hands and Dylan introduced Hayden.

"Got it back here for you, sir. Dave'll take it out front if you want to come with me and settle up."

Hayden followed him into a cold, drafty office, waiting while the guy prepared his bill. It was steep, as Dylan had suggested, but Hayden didn't much care. He handed over his credit card and while he waited for the machine to connect, he looked out through the window at Dylan.

The deputy stood in the entrance to the garage, looking out into the distance, arms folded: tall, lean, beautiful. Hayden observed him covertly for a minute, while inside he ached for all that he was losing as suddenly as he had found it.

"Enter your PIN, sir," the mechanic prompted him.

Hayden did as he was told, waited for his receipt, then shook hands with the man. He squared his shoulders and walked back out through the garage.

His car waited out front, by Dylan's police cruiser. Hayden didn't even inspect the repair work to the hood or the new tyre. He couldn't have cared less. In fact, he cursed the garage for getting the work done on time. If Dylan had wanted to keep him here, why hadn't he told the mechanics to take four days on the job? That was what Hayden would have done. He took his bag silently from

Dylan and stashed it in the trunk before he got in. The keys were in the ignition. He adjusted his seat before he started the engine and fastened his seatbelt.

Dylan stood by his door. Hayden pushed the button to the electric window. Dylan put his hand on the top of the door. "Follow the road for another mile, then make a right for the interstate."

"Thanks for everything," Hayden said quietly.

Dylan didn't reply. Hayden glanced back into the garage before he rested his hand over Dylan's.

"Bye."

"Bye. You take care now." Dylan slid his hand away. He stepped back from the car.

Hayden's jaw quivered. He kept it tightly clamped shut. He looked once over his shoulder before he stepped hard on the accelerator, shooting out into the middle of the road and putting as much distance between him and the town of Blackstone as he could.

Dylan faded away to a dot in the distance and Hayden saw the turnoff. He braked hard and flew onto the highway. He joined the flow of traffic, his foot down hard. He plucked at his seatbelt as it seemed to be crushing his chest, squashing the breath out of him.

Dylan walked back to his car. He kept his expression carefully neutral because the owner of the garage was standing there watching. He made a U-turn and set off back to his house, the only safe haven as far as he could see. He switched off the engine in the driveway and got out.

He unlocked the front door and stepped inside. He didn't kick his boots off, only sank down on the bottom step of the stairs and bent his head, hands dangling between his knees.

It's okay, he told himself. *It's okay.*

PART TWO

CHAPTER SEVEN

Hayden returned to his life and carried on much the same, apart from the fact that he was deeply changed, deeply scarred by that one fateful encounter. Time passed and his memories faded along with that sting of hurt, that pain, which had initially screwed him up beyond recognisable.

But he became quieter, withdrawn, taciturn. He let the world carry on around him and he didn't say anything about it. Nothing mattered that much anymore. Not now that he'd had a glimpse of what could have been, and had it all taken away as quickly as it had arrived.

He knew he wouldn't ever go back to Blackstone and look Dylan up. He had to be satisfied with his life.

But then fate intervened once again, ten years down the line, dealing its cards in the most terrible of ways.

Hayden waited two respectable years after the blow that befell him and then he set out to Blackstone on the morning of a summer's day, with an overnight bag just in case.

He was thirty-seven years old, too young to carry on forgetting.

Hayden drove into the centre of town with his palms wet and his heart furiously hammering against his ribs as though pleading to be let out. He felt it begging, the way it had continued to beg through twelve long years of denial.

He had fought with it and fought with it and finally it had won. It had brought him back here and he had followed, a slave to it, a prisoner.

But he didn't know what he would find. Who said Dylan was here? He could be halfway across the world, he could be shacked up with another guy, he could be dead.

That troublesome heart of his told him that Dylan was still here, though. He had been born here and he hadn't shown interest in leaving, so why shouldn't he still be here? And if he wasn't, what would Hayden do? Simple. He would

search the world if he had to, until he found the man he'd left behind.

He let the air-conditioning dry the sweat on his brow another few bracing minutes before he got out of the car, not bothering to lock it behind him. He took the steps up to the police station slowly, taking his time, in no rush any more to confront his destiny. Especially not when he was unsure what he would find there.

He pushed open the glass door and stepped into cold air, approaching a desk sergeant who beamed at him instantaneously as though the opening of the door triggered the nerves in his face.

"Good afternoon, sir. What can I do for you this fine day?"

"Hi. I'm- er," Hayden stopped, cleared his dry throat. "I'm looking for Deputy, er, Hubble."

The man continued to grin like The Cheshire Cat. "You're out of touch, sir. He hasn't been deputy for a long time."

Hayden's hopes and dreams sank miserably into his shoes. "No?"

"No, he's sheriff now."

Hayden smiled hesitantly. He was still here. Maybe he still had a chance. "Can I see him?"

"He's at a funeral right now. Not sure when he's expected back."

"Oh. Right."

"Want to leave your number and he can give you a call?"

"I… n-no. It's okay. I'll catch him again." Hayden stepped back as he spoke. His courage was gone.

"Are you sure?"

"Yeah. It's fine. Thanks." Hayden turned and fled.

The heat hit him as he stepped outside. He paused on the steps, cursing himself and his failure to see this through. What was he going to do? Hang around town like a hobo and come back later? Drive all the way back home and come back another day? Oh God, he would never be able to do this again. Not ever.

He stopped as a tall, lean man climbed from his patrol car, carrying his hat. His hair was cut shorter than Hayden remembered, still that glossy chestnut brown. Prior to today, Hayden hadn't been able to visualise Dylan's face completely any longer. Time had dulled the lustre of those golden eyes in his mind, blanked out the curve of Dylan's chiselled jaw and the quirk of his sensual mouth. The slow disappearance of Dylan's face from his memory was like an extra slap in the face. He had wished fervently with all his heart that he had one photo.

Now that beloved face came back, imprinted forever, as Dylan turned around to face him.

For a moment he didn't seem to recognise him. He came to the steps and it seemed like he would walk straight past Hayden and then Dylan stopped.

Standing one step down from Hayden, he stared. His eyes were bright with green sparks in the sunlight, like shards of emerald glass. Fine lines emphasised them, and curved around his beautiful mouth. His short haircut only drew further attention to his stunning face.

Dylan, if it were possible, had merely grown more handsome in the intervening twelve years.

"Hello, Dylan."

Dylan's hat fell from his hands. He grew pale beneath his summer tan. His mouth worked but it seemed he couldn't speak.

Hayden picked up his hat. He waited for Dylan to get himself together, while inside he barely held himself intact.

"What are you doing here?"

"I came to see how you are."

Dylan continued to stare, dark brows drawn together in a frown as though he simply couldn't comprehend why Hayden had turned up now, after all this time. But that was okay, he hadn't expected Dylan to understand.

"I…" Dylan shook his head. He blinked as though coming up from underwater. He took his hat back, glanced around. "Okay, let's go get a coffee."

He set off, walking back to his car.

Hayden followed quickly on trembling legs.

They drove the short distance up the road to a diner, Hayden looking at Dylan covertly out of the corner of his eye, tracing the strong curve of his smoothly shaven jaw with his gaze and wishing his tongue and lips could follow the path his eyes took. Dylan didn't look any different. Age had only improved him, like a fine wine. He took Hayden's breath away.

Dylan glanced at him as he pulled over to the kerb. Hayden looked away. He climbed out and followed Dylan's lead.

It was strange to be back in Blackstone during summer, strange not to be in five layers and half-frozen to death. Hayden wore jeans and a T-shirt. Dylan wore a short-sleeved black shirt and matching pants, which hugged every curve of his lean hips and strong thighs. The light dusting of hair on his forearms was golden. The gold star on his chest glittered in the sun. Hayden trailed behind and stared at the weapons on his utility belt, dropping his gaze lower to admire Dylan's firm buttocks.

Dylan led Hayden through the diner. Several people greeted the sheriff as he passed and the waitress called him honey. Clearly he commanded respect around here. Hayden wondered if he was out, if these people knew which gender he preferred in his spare time. Maybe Hayden had been an experiment, the way Dylan had been for him. Maybe Dylan had a wife now.

Dylan directed him to a booth at the back, near the serving hatch. Hayden sat opposite, and immediately checked Dylan's left hand. No wedding ring.

He tried to relax, sitting back, but nausea clawed at his throat and his heart beat so hard he was sure Dylan could hear it. He stretched out his aching right leg under the table. He accidentally made contact with Dylan's foot and pulled it back.

"You still limp," Dylan said, his gaze fixed unblinkingly on Hayden's.

Hayden shrugged. Some things hadn't changed. "I had another couple of

operations. Didn't make any difference. Sometimes I think they might as well cut the damn thing off."

Dylan didn't respond. An uneasy silence grew.

"Hey, Dylan." The blonde waitress who knew the sheriff as 'honey' appeared at their table, perusing Hayden with interest.

"Hi, Michelle. I'll take an iced tea, please."

"You bet, and for you, sir?"

"Um, cranberry juice, please."

"Coming right up." Michelle winked at Dylan and left the table.

"She likes you," Hayden remarked.

Dylan shrugged.

"Are you out?"

"No."

"Why not? You're still gay, aren't you?"

Dylan shot him something perilously close to a glare. His body language was all stiff tension, all fight-or-flight. "*What*? Am I still gay? I wasn't aware you could change back and forth. I'm not *you*, you know."

Hayden was deeply stung. In his fondest fantasies, Dylan had fallen into his arms at first sight today. Never had he been unfriendly and antagonistic.

Hayden swallowed. He clasped his sweating hands together on his lap. "You're angry with me."

Dylan looked away. A muscle ticked in his clamped jaw. "Does your wife know you're here?"

"My wife died of breast cancer two years ago."

Dylan's eyes flew to his. Before he could speak, the words tumbled out that Hayden had tried to formulate in his head on the way here, the words he was convinced he would never have the courage to say.

"I couldn't come back here while she was still alive. You have to understand that. I made a commitment to her. She battled it for seven years. I would never have left her. Please tell me you understand."

Dylan didn't say anything. He kept his eyes on Hayden. Hayden bowed his head. Tears dripped from his stinging eyes to splash the table. He turned his face abruptly to the wall, hand over his eyes as the waitress arrived with their drinks.

The silence with which she put the glasses down and left suggested she was communicating non-verbally with Dylan about Hayden's distress, but Hayden didn't care. The misery had broken through the dam, finally.

Not once had he ever cried over the loss of Dylan. Not the way he'd cried over Julianna.

He wiped his eyes roughly but the tears continued to pour. "Please," he said. "Please tell me you don't think I'm the most terrible person who ever lived." He sat back against his seat, head bowed, trying to stifle sobs.

"You need to pull yourself together. I didn't bring you here to cry like a little girl. And I don't know what you want. I'm with someone."

Dylan's voice stung him like a lash. His words tore deep, fresh wounds into Hayden's scars. Hayden stumbled out of the booth. He upset the glass of cranberry juice; it flooded scarlet onto his jeans, the seat, the floor. Hayden ran from the diner.

CHAPTER EIGHT

He stumbled into the bright sunshine, in front of a car just pulling up, which honked furiously at him.

"Hey, Mister! Watch where you're fucking going."

Hayden started running, although with his poor leg it was more of an ungraceful shuffle, back toward the police station, to where his car waited to take him away from this nightmare.

He didn't get far. He ducked into the first alleyway he found, leg on fire. He held onto the wall, bent double, mouth full of saliva, ready to vomit.

No, no, this couldn't be happening. Oh God, what was he even doing here? He'd waited two agonising years after the preceding ten and he'd told himself it was too late now, that he would have truly missed his chance. All his life he'd tried to be a good person and being a good person involved atoning for his one terrible, unforgiveable sin: staying with the person he'd pledged his life to. He couldn't have come back any sooner. He couldn't have abandoned Julianna for anything. Not even Dylan.

He cried, clutching to the wall with his fingers curled into claws. His head hung down. The nausea receded, leaving him weak and uncoordinated. At that moment, he didn't know how he was going to get back to his car, let alone drive home.

A shadow at the mouth of the alleyway blocked out the sunlight. Hayden straightened up as best he could. Wiping a hand over his face, he tried to be strong for another emotional blow from Dylan.

The sheriff came closer. His face was cold as stone but his eyes, still so golden, were full of anguish. "You didn't want me then. What did you think, I'd keep myself as a monk for you on the off chance you might come back? I have a life with a man I love! Don't think you can walk back in here and take me after twelve fucking years!" His voice had risen to a shout and Hayden flinched at every word.

He stepped back as Dylan moved forward with sudden intent on his face. He collided hard with the wall as Dylan grabbed him by the back of his head and forced a kiss on his lips.

Hayden gasped. He clutched Dylan's face in both hands, opening his mouth to the kiss, tasting Dylan's tongue with his own.

Dylan groaned. An arm went around Hayden's back, pulling him firmly against his body. The kiss deepened into desperate passion. They strained against each other as though each could pull the other into his own body by the strength of their need.

Hayden remembered this kiss. He remembered the force of Dylan's desire for him and how it had never been equalled. He didn't understand how two people who felt this way could ever have denied what existed between them.

The kiss broke and turned into a lingering embrace. Hayden hid his face against Dylan's shoulder. "I loved you," he said. "I loved you."

Dylan's fingers caressed the nape of his neck a moment before he pulled away. He turned his back, walked a few paces, turned around. His eyes were liquid. "I waited five years," he said. "It was enough. I gave myself to someone else, just like you did."

Hayden's lip trembled and tears trickled hopelessly down his cheeks. "Was that my kiss goodbye?"

Dylan waited a moment before he responded. He blinked a few times, then he lifted his chin. "Yes. Don't come back." He turned and walked out of the alley.

Hayden sat on the ground in the alleyway for thirty-five minutes before he finally stood and made his way out. He walked slowly back to the police station, stopping at a store on the way to buy a packet of tissues and a bottle of water. His head ached fiercely and his leg nagged spitefully at him.

He slid into his car and started the engine, switching on the air-conditioning. He faced a long drive home to an empty house. He hadn't expected to fail so spectacularly today. He had known Dylan was the one for him the

moment the cop walked up to his stranded car on that road in the snow. So why didn't Dylan realise it too? Why didn't he realise Hayden would love and nurture him the rest of his life?

But life wasn't fair and not many people got their happy endings. Usually they only got what they deserved and Hayden guessed he didn't deserve Dylan.

He sat back, eyes closed, breathing deeply, trying to breathe through his pain the way he did with his leg.

A cop getting out of the car next to him attracted his attention. He opened his window. "Excuse me, Officer. Can you recommend a good hotel in town?"

"Sure." The man was tall and blond, well built. His name badge announced he was Deputy Sheriff. For a moment Hayden wondered if he was the one. Dylan's partner. Would Dylan be that obvious? "Take a left out of here, go down half a mile and take another left. It's the end of the street, The Blackstone Inn, quiet and homey."

"Thanks very much."

"You here for business or pleasure, sir?"

Hayden hesitated. The pain rent his chest. "I hoped I'd come for pleasure. It didn't turn out that way. Have a good day, Officer." He put his window up and reversed out of his spot.

Dylan watched out of the window as Hayden's car pulled away. He had taken his time to get back here. Had he stayed in that alleyway all that time after Dylan had left? He slumped down at his desk, staring at the screensaver on his laptop. He'd been unnecessarily cruel to Hayden and that wasn't him.

Oh God, when he'd set off for work this morning he hadn't expected today to be the day Hayden walked back into his life, not after the way he'd hoped and dreamed for five years and then some, and then finally lost that hope and made do with what he could get.

Which was unfair to Will. Dylan was not making do with him. He'd been lucky Will had chosen him, despite Dylan's obvious flaws—namely that he was

in love with a ghost from twelve years ago.

As Hayden lay in the tub that night, he remembered taking a bath with Dylan. How they kissed, Dylan's strong arms around him. He remembered tracing the black ink of the dragon tattoo. He couldn't bear to go home, to his empty house.

He was still waiting for his life to begin.

He climbed out of the bath, dried himself, and dressed again. Then he took his room key and set off.

He recalled the way to Dylan's house easily enough. He pulled up on the opposite side of the street and shut his engine and lights off. The police cruiser stood in the driveway. Behind it was a black SUV. So that was Dylan's man's car. Clearly a penis extension. Hayden drove a small car. He had no need to brag.

The curtains were drawn over the lit living room windows. The bedroom was dark. Perhaps they were eating. Afterward, they would stack the dishwasher then climb the stairs. Maybe they would take a bath together and Dylan's man would stroke the black dragon.

Hayden slid down in his seat. What was he going to do? Stay here all night and will Dylan to him by the force of his desire?

The stairs light came on. A silhouette stood at the bedroom window, closing the curtains. Hayden remained still, staring up.

Dylan saw him. He froze, looking down. Then he pulled the curtains tightly closed. The light didn't come on. Perhaps Dylan sat in the dark brooding, or perhaps he and his man were already fumbling their clothes off while Hayden sat outside like the most deluded, desperate, lovelorn admirer that ever lived.

Dylan didn't tell Will that Hayden sat outside watching them. Nor did he tell him Hayden had walked back into his life that day. Will was well used to Dylan's silences, the brooding when he would drift away, remember the two-day love affair that had changed his life. They had never really discussed Hayden.

Dylan had only said there had once been someone. Someone he'd lost. It was all he needed to say. Will knew Hayden cast a shadow over Dylan's life and he would take him to the grave.

CHAPTER NINE

A bang in the distance awoke Hayden with a jolt. He blinked in the sunlight, his neck cramped and frozen, before his car door was wrenched open and a furious Dylan pulled him bodily from the vehicle.

"What are you still doing out here, Hayden, you creepy fucking stalker?" Dylan held him by the shirt with one hand. Hayden stared into his flashing eyes. Broken and defeated, he stayed limp in Dylan's grip, holding his hands out to his sides as though he were under arrest.

He saw Dylan's eyes shift from anger to anguish. The sheriff let go of him as another voice sounded.

"What's going on?"

Hayden's gaze turned and focused on Dylan's man as he strode down the driveway. Of average height and leaner than Dylan, his man had short, dark auburn hair and pale blue-green eyes. Apart from the fact he no doubt had a working leg and no limp, he was a carbon copy of Hayden in every detail.

The two of them stared at each other. Dylan flushed. "This is my two-night stand of twelve years ago," he told his man scornfully. "He thinks he has some claim."

Hayden sagged back against his car, leaden with misery. Dylan's man regarded him for another moment and then he turned and walked away without a word.

Dylan clenched his jaw. "Get in your car and drive away."

Hayden fell back into the driver's seat. He fumbled for the keys with an unsteady hand, his eyes burning.

Dylan walked back up his driveway. He closed the front door before Hayden had started the engine.

Dylan watched Hayden pull away, just to make sure. He sank down on the couch, looking fearfully at Will, who was in the kitchen drinking a glass of

water. Will put his glass down. He sighed and ran a hand through his hair before he came into the living room.

"I always knew he'd come back," he told Dylan. "After the first few years, I started to feel confident, even though I knew. The longer time went on, the more I thought I was wrong. But I always knew I only had you on loan."

Dylan shook his head. "No, Will."

Will smiled tenderly. He stood before Dylan, a hand stroking his cheek. "I'm going to pack a few things. I'll come back for the rest."

Dylan grabbed his wrist. "No."

Will leaned down and kissed him before he gently disentangled himself from Dylan's grip and walked out of the room, leaving Dylan stewing in fear, regret and something else: barely-concealed hope.

Hayden returned to the hotel with his tail between his legs. He shoved dirty clothes in his still unpacked bag and prepared to leave but he didn't get two steps from the bed before his leg gave way. He let himself fall, clutching at the covers, burying his face into the pillow.

Sometime during the afternoon he awoke from deep sleep. His head ached. He was all cried out. He negotiated his way to the bathroom, filled a glass from the tap, and drank. He went back to the bedroom, closed the curtains on the dazzling day, and shed his clothes before he crawled between the cool sheets to further oblivion.

At the door, Will hugged Dylan hard. He stepped out, carrying three bags to his car and Dylan watched the last seven years of his life walk away. He and Will had been comfortable companions. There had been tenderness and passion between them and mutual interests that made them perfectly suited. Will hadn't been Hayden, though. Dylan had never recaptured those two heady nights he had spent falling in love.

A knock on the door startled him from sleep. Hayden fished around on the floor for clothes, found his boxers, and pulled them on. He opened the door a crack, blinking at the visitor.

Dylan stood there wearing his uniform.

Hayden's beleaguered heart still found enough energy to leap into his throat. He clutched at the door in order to remain upright. "What are you…?"

Dylan sighed. He stepped closer, lifted a hand, trailing fingertips down Hayden's cheek. "I never forgot you, not once. I carried you inside me for twelve years."

Hayden couldn't speak.

"And those words I said to you…" Dylan looked ashamed.

"You don't think I'm a creepy fucking stalker then?" Hayden asked hopefully.

"No. I should be so lucky."

Hayden smiled. Dylan's thumb moved over his lips, tracing their outline. Hayden pursed them in a kiss. Dylan's eyes darkened. He moved in, his hand pulling Hayden's head to him.

This kiss was more tender than the one in the alleyway but no less passionate. It told Hayden he had come home.

They stumbled backwards into the room, Dylan shedding his clothes as he walked Hayden back to the bed. They fell there together and Dylan slid down his body, pulling the boxers from him. His first port of call was Hayden's right leg. His hands smoothed over his calf. His lips traced the scar and all pain was forgotten as Hayden dissolved into memories and bliss.

He lay there, a slave to Dylan's mouth as his lips moved up his inner thigh, into his groin, a tongue flicking over the head of his hard cock, before he sucked it down. Hayden gripped Dylan's hair. "Oh please, God, I want you."

Dylan rose to his knees. He was shirtless and shoeless but still wore his pants. He discarded his utility belt, the gun and Taser on it falling with a heavy thud to the floor. He reached into his back pocket, drawing a condom free, and some lube. *Prepared.* Intending to fuck Hayden the moment he came through the

door. Hayden trembled with desire. Dylan didn't strip. He only pushed his pants and boxers down his thighs and rolled the rubber on.

Then he gripped Hayden, pulling him on top of him. Hayden straddled his hips, flinching as Dylan rubbed cold liquid between his buttocks. Hayden reached behind him. He panted with excitement as he gripped Dylan's shaft, steadying it as he sank down.

Impaled, he gasped for breath, willing himself open as he took every inch. The pain was pleasure. Never had Hayden come close to this with another man in the twelve years since he met Dylan and never had he wanted to. That part of him had been locked away, waiting for Dylan to come with the key.

Dylan's flesh was a rock-hard, pulsing intrusion. Hayden sat with hands braced on his lover's chest, moving himself with slow turns of his pelvis. Dylan hissed in pleasure, hands on Hayden's hips.

Hayden leaned back, riding him, his own cock twitching and standing up to his belly. Dylan's hand enclosed it. He pumped it slowly and steadily and Hayden bucked and ground down harder.

Dylan cursed low under his breath. His other hand sought Hayden's torso, stroking, caressing every inch.

Hayden lost his breath. He slid forward, his chest pressed against Dylan's. They kissed. Dylan held him hard and Hayden came in a scorching flood down Dylan's body.

Dylan gripped his hips, thrusting into his body and Hayden continued his movements until Dylan came to climax.

His lover lay back, breathing heavily, sweat gleaming on his upper lip. Never had Hayden seen such a beautiful sight. Their lips met. Dylan murmured his love.

They lay together in the afterglow, watching the ceiling fan turning lazily as it evaporated the sweat from their bodies.

Dylan glanced over at Hayden. "Did you tell your wife about us?"

"Yes. I had to. I told her as soon as I got home."

"And she didn't leave you?"

"No. She was hurt and she cried but she never once threatened to leave. She loved me more than I deserved."

Dylan's fingers laced with his.

Hayden took a breath and then continued. "When… it got closer to the end, she told me to go find you. After she'd gone."

Their eyes locked. Dylan swallowed, his eyes brimming. "She was a special lady."

"Yes."

"I hope I can do her justice."

They leaned into each other.

"You can," Hayden said as their lips touched.

Some time later, he thought to ask Dylan about his man. "He's gone," Dylan said. "He expected you to come back, sooner or later."

"He looked just like me."

"I know. I'm ashamed that he knew that, too."

Hayden sighed. "What do you want to do?"

"Live with you. Love you."

"I can't live at your house. Not when you were there seven years with him. And you can't live at mine."

They were silent. "Do you still have Boots?" Hayden asked.

Dylan chuckled. "Yeah. He's a senior citizen now, bless him."

"I'm glad. You and Boots, you make a great team."

Dylan leaned on his arm, looking down at him, brushing some hair away from Hayden's eyes. "Sell your house. We'll buy somewhere new."

"In Blackstone?"

"If you can bear being in the middle of nowhere. We have a shortage of good dentists."

Hayden smiled. "Dylan, can I ask you a favour?"

"Sure."

"Will you open your mouth and let me look at your fantastic teeth?"

Dylan rolled on top of him, grinning. "I hope you don't mean this in a fetishistic kind of way."

"Not much." Hayden groaned in pleasure as he looked up into Dylan's open mouth. "Wonderful, just wonderful. If everyone had teeth like you, I'd be out of a job."

Dylan kissed him on one clavicle. He slid down Hayden's body and Hayden watched the progress of his mouth down his torso. He squirmed under every kiss, his body on fire.

"I knew you were the man for me when I saw your teeth."

Dylan lifted his head, flashing his pearly whites again. He licked one stiff nipple, making Hayden groan. "I knew you were the man for me when I asked you to breathe on me and I smelled chocolate. You stood so close to me, I almost kissed you in that moment. My heart started to beat so hard it hurt. I didn't know what was wrong with me. I thought I was about to have a heart attack."

Hayden stroked his head. "I'm sorry you had to wait so long."

"You were worth it."

"I want my life to start now that I'm where I should be."

"It will. I promise." Dylan shifted back over him. Their lips clung together in a sweet kiss.

Hayden's torment and deceit blew away. The sins of the past were lost into time. His penance for his infidelity had been the loss of Dylan for twelve years; he knew that. But now he was ready to take charge of his destiny and take what he needed.

For a moment, he thought of his time with Julianna, and her death. He locked those memories away in a special place in his heart, for now it was time to open the casket he had forbidden himself from ever looking inside, and let Dylan free.

THE END

About the Author

Scarlet likes cats and hats and firmly believes that the only thing better than one attractive man is two attractive men.

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Also by Scarlet Blackwell:

Available at **Silver Publishing**:

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** Please note: the dates above are subject to change **

Reviews for *Rescue Me*:

Rescue Me by Scarlet Blackwell is a character driven, angst-filled, heart-wrenching, soul redeeming, romantic story with one of the best endings I've read in a long time.
(5 stars — Top Pick)

— Night Owl Reviews

… **Rescue Me** is an impressive story that illustrates love has no gender, in spite of predetermined thoughts. Scarlet Blackwell has created an exceedingly enjoyable saga.
(4 ½ nymphs)

— Literary Nymphs

Reviews for Into the Light:

Into the Light by **Scarlet Blackwell** is powerful and filled with remorse, sadness, misunderstanding, tension, angst, anxiety and hope. I wasn't expecting to run the gauntlet of these emotions and more while reading about Sean and Eden, but once I started I couldn't put it down.
(5 stars — Recommended Read)

— Delightful Divas